

# ARNEC CONNECTIONS

Working Together for Early Childhood

No. 11, 2016



## THEME:

The transformative power of  
Early Childhood Development (ECD):  
Seamless transitions across the  
continuum from prenatal to 8 years



**ARNEC**

Asia-Pacific Regional Network  
for Early Childhood

# ARNEC CONNECTIONS

Working Together for Early Childhood

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**Cover Photo:** 'Outdoor play with recycled materials in preschool' photocredit@ Filip Lenaerts, VVOB Vietnam

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# Editorial Note

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We all know how important it is for connections to be built between children's home environments and their various community settings in which they participate. Over 30 years ago Bronfenbrenner identified these connections as the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and reminded us that the more people in these different contexts work together, the better children's outcomes. Today we talk about the holistic nature of our work with young children, their families, communities and the importance of seamless transitions for children as they move from one context to another across their day, and over time.

Again referring to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), we know that all levels of the system impact on children's experiences of transitions. Government and organisational policies and practices can enhance transitions when they create a context whereby different agencies can easily co-operate, share information and communicate. At the community level, organisations can work together to provide seamless services so families do not have the stress of telling their stories multiple times to many different agencies nor are exposed to the risk of falling between different eligibility criteria. Positive relationships between early childhood programmes and schools make it possible for children to move into school settings without disrupting their learning. The ability of early childhood programmes and schools to build positive relationships with families ensures that the learning opportunities offered to children are best built on what they already know. As the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (UNESCO 2014) states, a key element of effective early years education is the support children receive in their *transition from the home or pre-primary environment to formal education, and importantly, 'how ready schools are to help the child with a smooth transition'* (UNESCO 2014: 69). In this edition of *Connections*, we address these different levels of the ecological model through the strands of Policies, Partnerships, and Services and Programmes.

A number of articles address the transition from home into early childhood settings and from there onto school. Kerry McCuaig discusses the relationship between school and child care in Ontario, noting that many early childhood, after school and holiday care programmes are based in elementary schools. Tshering Wangmo examines the transition from home to school in Bhutan. Tshering uses a 'funds of knowledge' approach (Moll et al 1992) and argues that children bring a wealth of knowledge from home into the school but it is difficult for teachers to recognise and value this knowledge. Sadaf Shallwani examines the factors making schools in Pakistan ready for children and finds that the extent to which teachers engage with children (pedagogy and interaction) are key in influencing access and attendance. Dang Tuyet Anh, Filip Lenaerts and Sarah Braeye discuss the transition to school in Vietnam, which is particularly problematic for disadvantaged children. School leaders are important in transition as they support early childhood and school staff to work together. Charlotte Lee, Maria Rose, Kreangkrai Chaimuangdee and Romi Laskin discuss partnerships between the Life Skills Development Foundation, local governments and public schools in Thailand aimed at improving both participation of young children in kindergarten and transition to school. They facilitated a parenting volunteer programme and provided continuing education for child care workers and kindergarten teachers. Genevieve Collantes, Nilda Delgado and Frank Emboltura discuss a literacy-rich programme in the Philippines. Here, the idea of home-school partnerships is essential and the school offers parent education and home visits. Older children (most of whom are caregivers for younger children) are also provided training to enhance the literacy experiences offered in the home.

Other articles address partnerships between various agencies/organisations, sometimes including different levels of government, for example partnerships between agencies delivering services to children and families in Bhutan. In this case, the government and the development partner jointly plan projects which are

then delivered through district and local governments. Deepa Manichan outlines the partnership between UNICEF, government, local and international NGOs which aims to improve access and participation of young children in early childhood programmes in Timor-Leste. Here, the stakeholders have developed a parenting programme, a public preschool programme, home or community-based preschool for children in small and/or remote communities and family-based preschools for those in very remote settings. Kenny Alderson discusses the partnerships they developed between early childhood teaching teams and external professionals in four early childhood services in Aotearoa New Zealand. Collaboration with parents/*whanau* formed the heart of these partnerships. Transformative partnerships were developed with local schools, local *marae* and *kaumatua* and government agencies, which significantly improved children's transition to school. Narmaya Thapa discusses the development of early childhood services in Kapilvastu, Nepal. This was an innovative approach where Save the Children worked with the local government to develop early childhood centres.

Two articles address the education environment itself and the ways in which this offers opportunities for children to learn. Meenakshi Dogra and Sandeep Sharma write about the growing number of private schools in India, which emphasise discipline, compliance, instruction in English and a push-down curriculum. Kerrie Proulx and Frances Aboud share the work they are doing with ChildFund International and Sumba Integrated Development on the island of Sumba, eastern Indonesia to integrate disaster risk reduction into early childhood programmes.

Finally, all these programmes operate in a policy environment that sets the context for the work they do. Dewi Fitriani discusses Indonesian policy and the way in which policy supports the development of early childhood services. Here, universal access to early childhood education is facilitated through the One Village One Early Childhood Centre programme.

Collectively, the articles in this edition highlight the importance of creating holistic and cohesive environments that positively contribute to children's development. We know from research that the connections and continuities in young children's lives are critical in laying the foundation for their overall well-being. There is also evidence showing children's knowledge, experiences and abilities play a key role in influencing the transitions that occur in their lives (Fabian and Dunlop 2007; Dockett and Perry, 2007). This is consistent with established theoretical and empirical developments which consider children to be active participants in shaping their own learning and the world around them (Moll 1992; Prout and James 1997; Levine and New 2008). In our editorial reflection, it is therefore vital to recognise the importance of building a shared understanding of effective and holistic connections for young children, particularly in educational systems where resources are limited and access to services is delivered in diverse ways across the public and private sectors, and in both formal and informal settings.

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# What is a ready school in Pakistan? Research findings on factors affecting children's transition into early primary school

Sadaf Shallwani, PhD, University of Toronto, Canada

The primary education system in Pakistan faces a number of challenges, evidenced by low enrolment rates, high drop out and repetition rates, and low learning levels (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014; South Asian Forum for Educational Development, 2015). The crisis is greatest in the earliest years of primary education, when children are entering and adjusting to the school system, and gaining basic literacy and numeracy skills.

From a rights-based perspective, all children have the right to learn, and communities and schools have the responsibility to ensure that educational environments enable children's successful learning (Bartlett, Arnold, Shallwani, & Gowani, 2010). It is thus imperative to understand how schools in Pakistan support, or fail to support, children's success in schooling. This is particularly critical at the very beginning when children first enter school – in other words, their transition to primary schooling. While the early childhood transition literature has tended to emphasize the readiness of children for school, the question of how schools support children compels us to focus on the readiness of schools for children. It is necessary to understand the characteristics that define *ready schools* – schools that are ready to receive children and enable their success.

There is limited empirical research to date that examines what makes a ready school, particularly in contexts such as Pakistan. This article summarizes and discusses findings from my doctoral research (Shallwani, 2015), in which I explored and developed a contextually grounded, evidence-based understanding of ready schools in Pakistan.

## Methods

The study used a mixed methods approach to examine the question "What is a ready school in Pakistan?" A ready school was defined as one that supports children in their transition into primary schooling, resulting in the following successful outcomes for children: access to schooling, adjustment to school, and learning in school. In Pakistan,

primary schooling includes Grades 1 through 5, and some schools include one or two years of pre-primary education. However, at most government (public) schools, Grade 1 is the first point of entry point for children's education. Thus, the study focused on children's entry into, adjustment in, and learning in Grade 1.

The study was linked to a larger research project which examined the effects of the Releasing Confidence and Creativity (RCC) early childhood programme in Pakistan, led by the Aga Khan Foundation. As part of the RCC study, information was gathered on a number of school characteristics, observations were conducted to evaluate quality in pre-primary and Grade 1 classrooms, and students' learning outcomes were assessed at the end of Grade 1. The sample included schools both with and without the RCC intervention.

Quantitative methods were used to examine relationships between school factors and transition outcomes in a sub-sample of 35 government schools in the province of Sindh. Bivariate analyses (correlations and t-tests) were conducted to explore relationships between specific school- and classroom-level predictors, such as school facilities, level of RCC intervention, and classroom quality, and the transition outcomes of interest: Grade 1 enrolment, attendance, and learning achievement scores. Qualitative interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with eight teachers (five female) and 22 parents (20 female) of Grade 1 students at four of the schools, asking about their perspectives on school factors affecting children's transition outcomes. A grounded theory approach was used to analyze the data thematically according to the analytic framework.

## Findings

The quantitative analyses found that children's enrolment in Grade 1, an indicator of access, was associated with geographical area and dimensions of school quality. Children's attendance in Grade 1, indicative of both adjustment and access to primary schooling, was associated with

the presence of pre-primary programmes. Children's learning in Grade 1 was found to be more strongly associated with the quality of the classroom environment and the role of the teacher (as indicated by the level of RCC intervention).

The qualitative responses from the study added richness to the findings. With regard to access, parents and teachers indicated that the affordability of government schools was key for children's enrolment. However, once children were enrolled, their attendance and retention were influenced by the teacher's attention (i.e., noticing and following-up on children's absences) as well as the teacher's approaches (i.e., warmth versus harshness). Some parents also mentioned negative interactions among peers as affecting drop-out. With regard to adjustment, parents and teachers emphasized the teacher's approach and interactions with children, including the teacher expressing love and playing elements of a parental role, as key to supporting children's adjustment to school. Respondents also indicated that pre-primary education eased children's transition to school. When discussing children's learning and success in school, parents and teachers again focused on the role of the teacher. This included the teacher's attention and follow-up towards children (the teacher paying attention to and responding to individual children's learning experiences), the teacher's instructional effectiveness (the efficacy of the teacher's method of teaching and explaining), and the teacher's approach and interactions (the way the teacher interacts and relates with the children). Some respondents highlighted other aspects of the school or classroom environment, such as learning displays and materials, as important for children's success.

Table 1 provides a summary of the school factors that surfaced from the literature (see review of the literature in Shallwani, 2015) and the study's findings for each transition outcome.

Parents and teachers also discussed a number of context-related themes, particularly around poverty and its effects

on children's education, circumstances faced in rural areas, and the challenges and opportunities in the government school system. In addition, the findings offered insights into participants' beliefs and values around knowledge and education. Although the focus of this study was on school factors, many respondents reported children's own capacities and motivations, as well as parents' attention, in addition to a number of teacher factors, to be crucial factors in their education outcomes.

Fundamentally, parents and teachers accorded considerable moral and practical value to acquiring knowledge and education. Education was viewed not just as a right but also as a personal and social responsibility. Respondents spoke about education as 'good', enlightening one's mind, and enabling one's effective participation in society. Moreover, the integration of religious knowledge with worldly knowledge was emphasized and contextualized with reference to one's religious and worldly responsibilities. It is each person's right as well as responsibility to "seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave" (a saying of the Prophet Muhammad [PBUH], cited by a respondent).

## Implications

The findings from the study and the conceptualization of ready schools in Pakistan raise important implications for policy and practice:

### (1) Government investment is crucial for access to quality primary education in Pakistan.

The findings from this study confirm the importance of government schools in providing affordable access to education for children in Pakistan, particularly for those from poor and rural families. While there are valid concerns about quality in government schools, these factors can be addressed and improved through targeted investment in primary education, including teacher training.

### (2) Improving education quality, particularly in the early grades, requires strengthening teacher capacity in classroom management, supportive relationships, and instructional effectiveness.

This study found a consistent emphasis on the role of the teacher, and on classroom activities and interactions, as critical

**Table 1: Summary of School-Level Factors Affecting Access, Adjustment, and Learning (Shallwani, 2015)**

	Literature	Quantitative Findings	Qualitative Findings
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Availability of a school in the community</li><li>• Accessibility of the school/classroom for children (distance)</li><li>• Certain dimensions of school quality such as teachers and availability of textbooks</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Geographical area (urban/rural)</li><li>• Toilet and water facilities</li><li>• Level of RCC intervention in Grade 1 classroom</li><li>• Presence of pre-primary programme</li><li>• Pre-primary classroom quality</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Affordability of government school</li><li>• Teacher attention and follow-up</li><li>• Teacher approach and interaction</li><li>• Peer interactions</li></ul>
Adjustment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teacher interactions</li><li>• Peer interactions</li><li>• Supportive classroom environment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presence of pre-primary programme</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teacher approach and interaction</li><li>• Pre-primary education</li></ul>
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teacher's instructional support and strategies</li><li>• Time on task/opportunity to learn</li><li>• Effective classroom management</li><li>• Teacher-child relationships</li></ul> <p>Majority world only:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Physically well-maintained and well-equipped classroom</li><li>• Available and accessible learning materials such as textbooks</li><li>• Teacher's knowledge of subject matter</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Level of RCC intervention in Grade 1 classroom</li><li>• Grade 1 classroom quality (especially occurrence of learning activities)</li><li>• Pre-primary classroom quality</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teacher attention</li><li>• Teacher effectiveness</li><li>• Teacher approach and interaction</li><li>• Classroom or school environment</li></ul>

for children's transitions. Education improvement initiatives – both from the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – must focus intensely on teachers, in the form of training and coaching, as well as creating working environments that motivate, support, and develop the skills of teachers.

Moreover, this study's findings indicate that the teachers' success in facilitating children's learning lies not only in instructional effectiveness, but also in teachers' approaches towards and interactions with children. Thus, teacher training programmes need to include the development of skills such as

attentiveness, individualized instruction, classroom management, building rapport and trust, fostering secure relationships with children, and creating a supportive classroom environment for children. These skills are especially important for teachers in the early primary grades.

### (3) Government investment in pre-primary education will have far-reaching benefits for students' success.

The findings from this study indicate that pre-primary education can effectively ease children's transition to school. Pre-primary education embedded in government schools has the potential to reach large numbers of children. While Pakistan has



made commendable policy commitments to early childhood education, financial investment has unfortunately not followed, resulting in limited provision of pre-primary programmes at most public schools, and a lack of quality in those that do exist. Inputs from NGOs have contributed to the availability and quality of pre-primary education. However, without government support, these solutions are often temporary and not sustainable. Government investment in pre-primary education will have far-reaching benefits for children's immediate and long-term success.

#### (4) Education is both a right and a responsibility for all stakeholders in Pakistan.

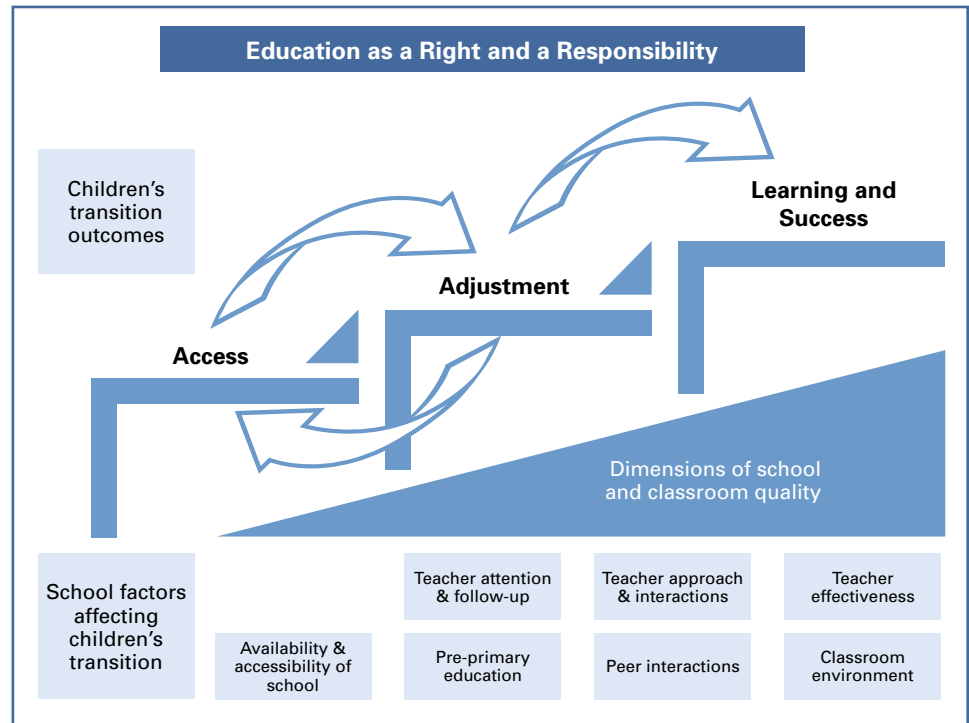
Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the conceptualization of education as a right as well as a responsibility places even greater obligations on all stakeholders – from children and families to schools, communities, and government systems – to ensure that all children gain good quality and holistic education. This includes access to quality school and classroom environments in which warm and effective teachers support student adjustment and learning to schooling, so that they can grow into responsible and contributing members of society.

#### Conclusion

This study empirically examined characteristics of ready schools in Pakistan, and identified school factors that can improve children's entry, adjustment, and learning in early primary schooling. Further research with larger samples and additional analyses will be important to confirm and refine the conceptualization of ready schools emerging from this study – for both Pakistan and other contexts. Nonetheless, the current findings clearly demarcate priority areas that can be acted upon by both government and civil society to improve children's early education outcomes in Pakistan.

Figure 1 summarizes the findings of the study with regard to school factors affecting children's access to, adjustment to, and learning success in early primary education in Pakistan.

Figure 1. Conceptualization of ready schools in Pakistan (Shallwani, 2015)



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# The sustainability of early childhood centres: The village fund programme and the “one village one early childhood centre programme” in Aceh

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One of the key ways to develop successful early childhood programmes is the government support through provision of funding, basic service programmes, infrastructure and policies. In Indonesia there are currently two policies which clearly support the sustainable development of early childhood education. First is the “Satu Desa Satu PAUD/One Village One Early Childhood Centre (ECC)” movement and the second is the “Programme Dana Desa/Village Fund programme”. Though these two policies were not launched at the same time, they clearly support each other to ensure the sustainability of early childhood education services in Indonesia.

In 2014, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) under the Directorate General for Early Childhood, Non-Formal and Informal Education (Dirjen PAUDNI) conducted a coordination and programme synchronization meeting attended by 124 participants from seven provinces in Indonesia of which Aceh was one. The meeting was aimed at networking, synchronising, coordinating and finding innovative ways to improve the quality of early childhood education. The “one village one early childhood education centre” was one of the programmes

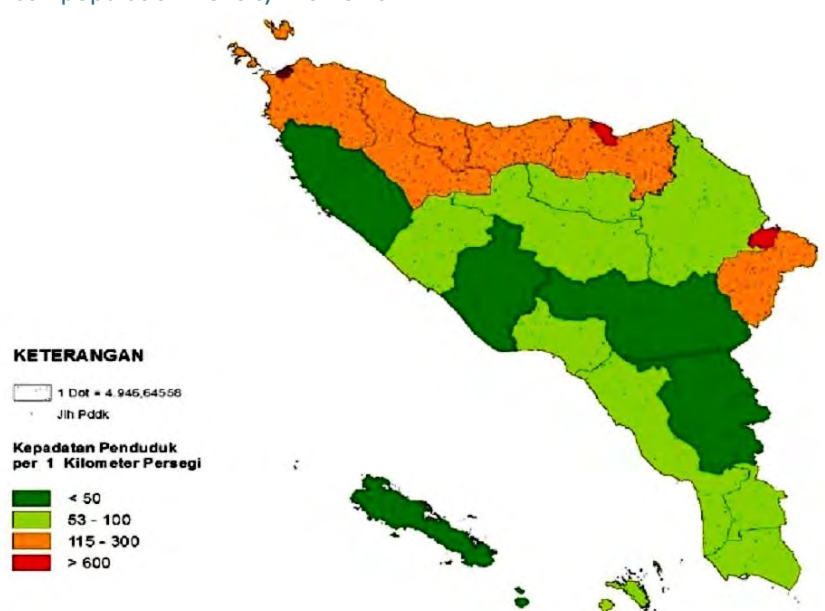
recommended for “Programme Integration for Village Empowerment” as part of the “Pengembangan Desa Ramah Anak / Child Friendly Village” programme. To facilitate better access to policy support, the government appointed all wives of governors, regents/majors, heads of

subdistricts and heads of villages to the Bunda PAUD/Chief of Advisory Board of the ECC in each of the respective levels.

## One village One Early Childhood Center (ECC) Programme

The ECC programme was implemented by MoEC during the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono presidency, from 2004 until 2014. The initiative has now expanded and it has become a national movement aiming to achieve equal access to quality education in Indonesia. Universal access to ECC has been included in Indonesia’s Education Agenda as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The aim is to provide all children with access to a good early childhood education or pre-elementary school education by 2030. This programme intends to establish as many ECC programmes as there are villages. The objective is to make ECC accessible for all children irrespective of their location, whether in urban, rural or disadvantaged areas. The assumption is that with a centre established within each village, parents will not have any difficulty in enrolling their

Figure 1. Aceh population Density Profile 2014.



children. Over time this is expected to increase the gross enrollment rate for early childhood services in Indonesia.

This programme is not only supported by the education sector but also by the health sector through the implementation of integrated health care (Posyandu) services in the same locations as the early childhood centres. This collaboration is evident in strategies such as:

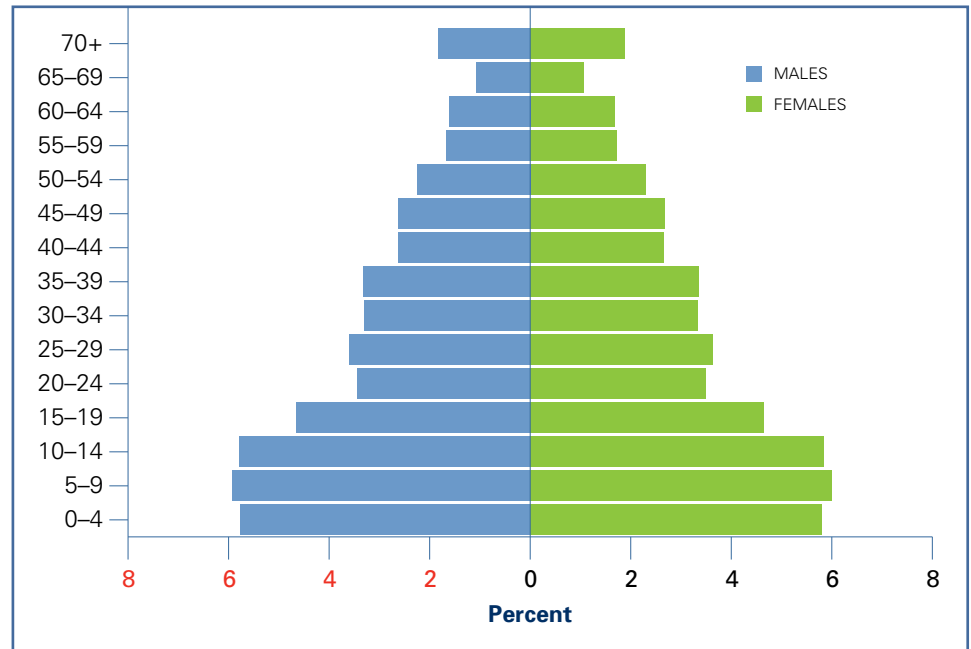
1. Integrated training for ECC and Posyandu cadres
2. Integrated services, in which the Posyandu services are provided in the ECC centres on previously agreed days
3. Cost sharing between the education and health offices for operating the centres
4. Parenting education in which both education and health issues can be easily integrated.



### Village Fund Programme

At the beginning of 2015, the newly elected president Joko Widodo introduced a programme called the Dana Desa/Village Fund. The programme is supported by Law No. 6 Year 2014 on Village and Government Regulation No. 22 Year 2015. The programme is administered by Kementerian Desa, Pembangunan Daerah Tertinggal dan Transmigrasi/Ministry of Village, Development of Disadvantaged Areas and Transmigration (Kemendesa PDTT) under Direktorat Jenderal Pembangunan dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Desa/ Directorate General for Development and Rural Community Empowerment). The Ministry issued Ministerial Regulation No.

Table 1. Aceh population ratio in 2010, by age and gender (BPS).



21 Year 2015 on Priority of Village Fund Utilization. The aim of this programme is to improve village welfare through improving public services, addressing economic and bridging development among villages plus enforcing village community as the subject of development. According to the regulation, this programme has three main principles, which are:

1. Justice; prioritizing the rights and obligations of the village community inclusively;
2. Needs priority; focusing on the more urgent and direct needs of most of community members;
3. Village typology; taking a holistic focus including village characteristics such as geography, sociology, anthropology, economic and village ecology in planning the development of the village.

The amount of funding varies between villages depending on the population size, geographic area, poverty level, and the area demographics (IKG). The first stage of Dana Desa was transferred to each village government by the Ministry of Finance. Currently, it is time for Kemendesa PDTT to supervise the use of the fund in relation to Ministry Regulation no. 21 year 2015, which requires prioritisation of village fund usage. According to the Village and PDTT Minister,

the first priority of the village fund is to build infrastructure such as roads, irrigation, simple bridges and drainage.

### Linkage between Two Policies toward Early Childhood Issues in Aceh

According to the Central Bureau Statistics (BPS) data in 2010, the population of Aceh is 4.6 million, with the largest cohort consisting of children between 0 – 14 years old (see Table 1). This distribution suggests that the largest portion of attention, funds, infrastructure and work programmes should be allocated to support the growth and development of children in this age range.

In 2014, Aceh was one of provinces which had the lowest Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) for Early Childhood Education (ECE) at below 50%. This GER indicates the percentage of children from birth to six who are enrolled in early childhood intervention. Aceh has 23 sub districts and only a few have launched and implemented the “one village one early childhood centre”. One of them is Aceh Jaya district.

In May 2014, the Aceh Jaya district launched the one village one early childhood centre programme with the aim of improving the capacity of the current generation. The head/ regent of the area, Azhar Abdurrahman, stated that Early Childhood Education is the gateway to improve the quality of Aceh



Jaya's new generation, particularly given the loss of five generations from the DI/TII war, RI-GAM war and the 2004 tsunami. This statement was included in his speech at the ECD Management Workshop held by the Aceh Education Council in Banda Aceh on August 19, 2015. Aceh Jaya has nine sub districts and a total of 172 villages/gampong. Within those villages, 243 early childhood centres currently exist, providing services for children 3 – 4 years old and 4 – 6 years old. Every centre has two primary teachers with an additional secondary teacher and they are paid with the money from the village fund.

Programme implementation was fully supported by UNICEF Aceh. The Head of UNICEF Aceh indicated that while the programme had only begun in 2010, it had already succeeded in reaching the goal of 'one village one early childhood centre' in 2014. The same programme was initiated in the Aceh Besar and Aceh Timur districts with varied results. What helped Aceh Jaya succeed in establishing the programme was the full support of its regent and the active participation of its Bunda PAUD. The Aceh Jaya Bunda PAUD was able to connect programmes from different government sectors to support and enforce early childhood issues; this was particularly evident especially across the education, social and health sectors. These are evidenced by regular Posyandu activities within the early childhood centres. In addition, the regent enforced the use of village funds to support the salary of ECE teachers and to meet operational costs for the early childhood education centres through the introduction of the Regent Regulation about the Use of Aceh Jaya Village Fund Programme no 19 year 2015.

As is the case with any policy implementation, there were unanticipated difficulties. Demographically, the Aceh region consists of plains and a plateau, and the population is spread unevenly. Sometimes there are villages with fewer than nine children in the early childhood age range. By comparison, areas such as Yogyakarta or Jakarta have a high population density; in these contexts it is much more likely that the one village one ECD programme would be highly successful.

In addition, the village fund programme has resulted in many groups attempting to register as villages in order to receive

funds. Requests for village registration are submitted to Minister of Home Affairs; to date, the ministry has received 1.800 new requests. This growth in village registrations means that much of the State Budget needs to be allocated to the village fund programme, a commitment that is unsustainable for the nation. To suppress the demand, the Ministry of Finance has requested the Ministry of Home Affairs to place a moratorium on establishing new villages.

## Conclusion

Good programmes need well conceptualized public policies and good teamwork to implement. Collaboration between the central government and village level is essential. This collaboration should involve not only men but also women. It should involve both a top down and bottom up approach to ensure balance. Good linkages among sectors are necessary for effective implementation. This is evident in the work in Aceh Jaya.

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# When education cares: A case study of seamless schools in Ontario, Canada

**Kerry McCuaig, Fellow Early Childhood Policy, Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, University of Toronto**

This article describes the impact on school culture, pedagogy and public image in Ontario, Canada, when the mandate of publicly funded education was broadened to include preschool-aged children. The transition of 4 and 5 year olds from private childcare to public education required the skilled management of service providers who were losing a traditional client base to schools, and of education administrators who were being asked to take on new responsibilities. School districts in two regions took on the challenge of integrating education and childcare within their schools. This article discusses their efforts.

children aged 4 to 12 years old. Every child would be entitled to six hours of schooling each day at no cost. Schools would also provide before- and after-school care, which parents could purchase for an affordable fee.

The province's Education Act<sup>3</sup> was amended in 2010 directing schools to operationalize the plan. The initiative was met with resistance. School districts were reluctant to take on responsibility for out-of-school care. The province's highly privatized childcare sector, concerned with losing older children as a revenue source, launched a campaign

open from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. Classrooms no longer sit empty while the local childcare has cut off enrolments. Rooms are available before and after school, as need demands. The school's toys, books, equipment, gyms, libraries and playgrounds remain available to the children throughout their entire day. All staff are school employees and report to the principal. Teams of early childhood educators (ECEs) teach preschool and also oversee the childcare continuing the nurturing environments where children learn best.

This seamless connection between school and childcare supports the home-school communications that are associated with student success. Evaluations show children were less stressed when their school day was blended into their out of school activities.<sup>5</sup> Parents also reported reduced stress when relieved of the daily task of transferring children between school and childcare. For some families, particularly those headed by lone parents, the integration of school and childcare allowed them to work.<sup>6</sup>

Maximizing the capacity of schools is a more efficient use of public resources. This contrasts with running parallel streams of childcare and education. Both serve the same children but each requires its own publicly subsidized facilities, resources, administration and staff.

Combining education and care offers other advantages. As employees of the school district, ECEs are unionized. As such they enjoy higher salaries than their counterparts working in private childcare, as well as enhanced benefits, pensions, and professional development opportunities. Despite offering higher compensation for ECEs, the school districts were able to use administrative efficiencies to reduce childcare fees and offer flexible enrolment options; luxuries private operators do not provide.

For advocates, access to childcare is an issue of social justice. Schools are public institutions available in every community.



Across Ontario, Canada, 262,500<sup>1</sup> 4 and 5 year olds now attend two years of publicly delivered preschool. Their entry into public schools represents the biggest educational expansion in the province since the post-World War II baby boom. This latest development was designed to provide children with the benefits of early education and to address an unmet demand for childcare.

The blueprint for the preschool model was developed in a 2009 special report commissioned by Ontario's Premier<sup>2</sup>. It recommended that schools become responsible for the education and care of

in opposition. The backlash resulted in a legislative amendment<sup>4</sup> passed in the spring of 2011. School districts retained responsibility for full day preschool and ensuring the availability of childcare for their students but had the option of contracting out its provision to community providers.

Only four, from an eligible 63 school districts, elected to operate their own childcare. The exceptions were located in Ottawa, the nation's capital and Waterloo, an amalgamated region of small cities, villages and rural communities in the southwestern part of the province. Instead of the standard school hours, schools in these regions are

Childcare in Canada primarily operates on parent fees. By necessity, services locate in neighbourhoods where parents are able to pay. By capitalizing on their economies of scale, school districts cross-subsidize their childcare programmes, establishing services in low-income communities formerly without any access to care. Mary Lou Mackie, the executive superintendent of education who led the transition in the Region of Waterloo viewed equitable access as essential: “We want to get to communities that don’t have anything, because this is going to be the great equalizer.”<sup>7</sup>

As school administrators were rapidly becoming experts on childcare delivery, they were also managing the roll out of a unique model of preschool. A team of two – a teacher and an ECE – are required to jointly create a ‘learn-through-play’ environment for their pupils. This was not a natural partnership. Teachers who were accustomed to ‘owning’ their classrooms were suspicious of the skill sets of ECEs who have less post-secondary training. For their part, the ECEs were concerned that school staff undervalued their child development knowledge. Pedagogical leaders in the schools brought the pairs together to study the new play-based curriculum and organised the educators’ schedules to accommodate joint planning. The complementary skills of the teams showed promising results. In the low-income communities that concerned Mackie, 26 percent of students entering grade one read at expected levels; two years following the introduction of the integrated programme 70 percent met reading expectations.<sup>8</sup>

Marianne Harvey, assistant principal for early learning at the Ottawa-Carlton School Board watched the teachers’ support for the new model grow alongside their students emergent skills: “The progress of children, and educators, has been amazing. I’ve been told so many times by teachers: ‘I didn’t realize the children could do that’.”<sup>9</sup>

Initial concerns that schools would push rigid academic expectations into early education have not been realized. Instead, Ontario’s education ministry has updated the curriculum in the primary grades in response to children who arrive at first grade more confident and interested in directing their own learning. As one first grade teacher told researchers:



*These kids walk in on day one and they own the classroom. They have ideas to share and projects in mind. They are not designed to sit in rows facing the teacher.*

There was no template for schools to emulate as they developed the new preschool model. Few school administrators had any child development training or experience supervising early childhood educators. Maria Lotimer, a principal in Waterloo region, admits to a steep learning curve but credits the programme with her own growth as an educator:

*I use a lot of the skills I’ve learned from dealing with our youngest ones and from our ECEs ... and I now carry that into how I work with students in all the grades.<sup>10</sup>*

Encouraged by the progress made, she wants schools to do more:

*I see schools as the hub of the community. A place where parents are welcomed from the time their children are infants and toddlers, and really feel that we are all a team working together for their children’s success.<sup>11</sup>*

Parents report being more involved in their child’s learning as a result of the new programme. The practice in schools was to schedule biannual parent-teacher conferences, while early childhood educators were accustomed to daily exchanges with parents. The ECEs brought this approach into schools, providing parents with regular updates on their children’s activities and demonstrating ways to extend learning at home.

Parents credit preschool with their children’s social and literacy advances. Evaluations indicate they want schools to further expand their role to include more family support

and health programmes. This is particularly true for disadvantaged families who rely on schools as their prime support.<sup>12</sup> Enrolment figures indicated that schools are bringing early education to more children. Previously, childcare had never served more than a third of the province’s preschool age children. Today, 94 percent of eligible children attend full-day, public preschool in Ontario.<sup>13</sup>

School administrators are collaborating with the regions’ children’s service managers and professional training institutions to develop a global approach to service delivery for children from birth to adolescence. The local colleges have been important to the transformation, both as educators and as childcare providers. They revamped their training programmes to prepare ECEs to work in schools. Using their own licensed childcare programmes as examples, the colleges modeled how other providers could refocus their services to younger children and develop business plans to support their financial viability. They provide needed expertise to schools on how to convert spaces for younger children and how to develop recreational programmes in schools for children aged 9 to 12. The children’s services division operates a centralised system to collect parent fees and a centralised registry allows parents to enrol for services online.

As the system matures, the advantages of public delivery are becoming apparent while the difficulties with private delivery continue to surface. Childcare operators contracted to school districts to provide before and after school care are finding it difficult to attract qualified staff. Service expansion in these regions has stalled while demand for care grows. Merely looking for childcare had become so competitive that the government banned programmes from charging parents to have their names put on waitlists.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, 98 percent of elementary schools in the Waterloo and Ottawa regions offer childcare for their students. Enrolment has doubled and there are no waitlists. In response to requests from their families, schools are now providing childcare for infants and toddlers.

## Conclusion

In terms of systems change, Ontario’s early years story has yet to be written. Big bureaucracies are hard to move; yet a handful of champions who seized a vision and worked it through, despite the obstacles, are demonstrating the possible.



Rather than a predicted loss in childcare due to education's involvement, service levels grew where schools took on the challenge. Parent fees declined while the compensation and status of ECEs increased. Meanwhile, positive outcomes have been documented for children and families. Parents and children report less stress. Children's vocabulary and reading comprehension have improved. The spectre of school delivery pushing academic expectations into early childhood has not materialized. Rather a "learn through play" approach is influencing primary school practice. These reformers are showing that when schools respond to the needs of their communities, it has a positive effect on the way the community feels about public education. A shared ownership creates a stronger case for the public investment needed for education equity and the resources all students need to succeed.

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## Cost sharing and collaboration with local government for early childhood development in Kapilvastu, Nepal

**Narmaya Thapa, Project Coordinator for Education Save the Children-Nepal**

### Background

Kapilvastu District lies in the Western Region of Nepal. Its total population is 571,936 of which 50% are female and 12% are children under 5 years old (Census-2011). Save the Children has been implementing a sponsorship programme since 2009 in Kapilvastu involving a partnership between four local organizations: Sunshine Social Development Organization, Kalika Self Reliance Social Centre, Seto Gurans and Lumbini Integrated Development Organization. Since 2014, the programme had collaborated with a range of district level government agencies, namely the District Development Committee, District Education Office, District Health Office and District Children Welfare Board, with the aim of creating a larger impact.

ECD is the gradual process of the emergence of sensory-motor, cognitive, social, and emotional capacities in young children. According to the WHO: "Children need a clean, safe, and protected physical environment to be safe from injuries and accidents while they are playing and learning" (WHO, 2009, p. 8). The first five years of life is a time when children's learning experiences and interactions with parents, friends and the environment shape their understanding of the world around them. Maria Montessori (1870-1952) claimed that "children's early experience provides an important formative and continuing influence in their later life"

(Allan & Levine, 2008, p. 111). Her claim is that early childhood is the most critical period in human development. It is widely recognized by both international research (Heckman, 2000) and research in Nepal that ECD motivates young children's learning and sets the foundation for better living (Jems, 2000, p. 6).

### ECD programme in Nepal

Every child has the right to quality ECD services for survival, growth and development. Article 39 of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 on "Rights of the Child" mentions that (2) "Every child shall have the right to education, health care nurturing, appropriate upbringing, sports, recreation and overall personality development from family and the state and (3) Every child shall have the right to formative child development, and child participation" (Secretariat, 2015, p. 13). ECD is also recognized in the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP-2016-2023), which identifies the "goal to promote a comprehensive approach to ECED programmes to safeguard the rights and fully develop the physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and moral potential of children below 5 years" (MoE, 2016, p. 16).

In Nepal, the Local Self-Governance Act (1999) has given the right to Village Development Committees (VDC) and Municipalities to grant permission to establish, implement and organize ECD

<sup>1</sup> Education Facts 2014-2015. (n.d.). Retrieved September 20, 2016, from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/educationFacts.html>.

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<sup>4</sup> Education Act, Ontario Regulation 221/11. Extended Day and Third Party Programmes. Retrieved from the Government of Ontario website: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110221>.

<sup>5</sup> Pelletier, J. (2012). New directions in integrated early childhood services in school-as hub models:



centres if the local community is willing to invest their own resources. The Government of Nepal (DoE) adopted and expanded the centre-based ECD programme from 2004. The Tenth Plan (2002-2007) and the EFA national plan of action (2004-2009) put further and special emphasis on the expansion of early education in the country. Nepal has set a target to provide ECD services to 80 percent of children aged 3–5 and aims to ensure 64 percent of new entrants at Grade-1 enter school with some previous ECD experience by 2015. The ECD strategy paper of DoE-2010 mentioned that VDCs and municipalities should take full responsibility to establish and operate these centres, mobilizing resources at the local level and collaborating with NGOs/INGOs, CBOs and other community level organizations. As a result, the number of ECD centres has increased significantly during the period.

DoE ASIP (2015) reported a total of 35,121 ECD centres currently functioning in Nepal with a Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of 77.1%; girls 76.7% and boys 78.1%. The rate for ECD new entrants in grade one is 59.6%: girls 60% and boys 59.1% (MoE, 2015, p. 30). But there is no provision to support ECCD construction under the Ministry of Education or Department of Education as yet.

### Status of the ECD Centers in Kapilvastu

In Kapilvastu District, 528 ECD centres are functioning, serving 18,332 children altogether. Among them, Save the Children supports 261 ECD centres (58 community-based and 203 school-based) where 6,718 children are attending in total. Though the ECED strategy paper of DoE-2010 mentioned that VDCs and municipalities should take full responsibility to establish and operate these centres, mobilizing local resources in collaboration with NGOs/INGOs and community level organizations, only 32% of these ECD centres have separate rooms while the rest are operating in community building or combining with grade one in schools. In this context, Save the Children has been constructing ECD centres in Kapilvastu in partnership with the district level government agency, District Development Committee (DDC) on a cost sharing approach since 2014 to increase ECD access.

Figure 1: ECCD center status-Kapilvastu

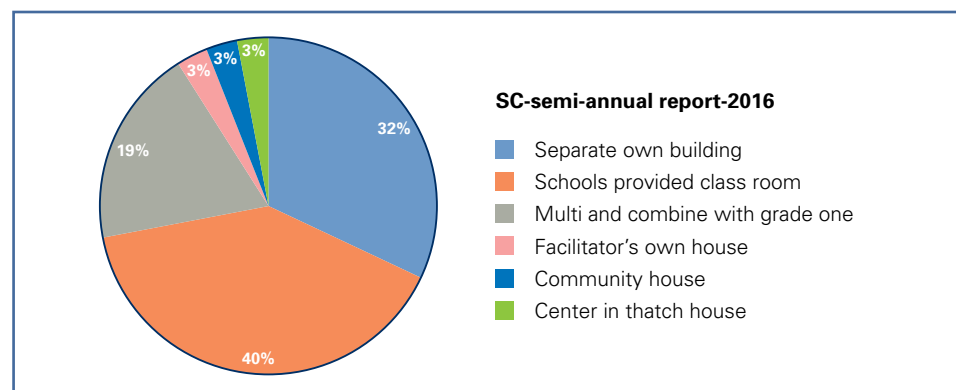


Table 1: Supported from DDC and VDCs for ECD programme

Fund allocated by DDC for ECCD center construction				Total fund from DDC and VDC			
Year	# of centers	Rate	Total cost (Rs.)	Year	DDC support	VDC support	Total fund (Rs.)
2014	8	350000	2,800,000	2014	2,800,000	751,000	3,551,000
2015	20	350000	7,000,000	2015	7,000,000	1,048,321	8,048,321
2016	21	350000	7,350,000	2016	7,350,000	3,593,000	10,943,000
<b>Year</b>	<b>49</b>		<b>17,150,000</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>17,150,000</b>	<b>5392321</b>	<b>22542321</b>

The per-centre construction cost is estimated at Rs.600,000 and only 41.66% of the estimated cost is borne by Save the Children. A total of 49 ECD buildings have been constructed by DDC, investing Rs.17,150,000 from 2014 to 2016 through this approach.

For the first time, Save the Children initiated the cost sharing partnership with DDC in Nepal. This approach is seen effective in expanding and ensuring the quality of the ECD programme in Kapilvastu-Nepal. After the cost-sharing collaboration partnership with DDC, most VDCs also allocated funds for ECD centres annually, for renovation and learning materials. DDC Kapilvastu plans to construct 80 ECD centres by 2018.

### Objective

The key objective of the cost-sharing approach for collaboration and partnership with the local government is to increase government investment in ECD programmes and make them accountable. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To increase resources from the local government for ECD programme.

2. To make government accountable and responsible for the ECD programme.

3. To establish good learning environments in ECD centres through a cost-sharing approach.

### Key Programme

- Planning and sub-award agreement between DDC and SC.
- Baseline survey and startup meeting with community.
- Orientation for community and layout the ECD centre.
- ECD centre construction support, includes classroom, toilet, and drinking water facilities.
- Support seating arrangements (carpet, P. form and cushion) and racks.
- Indoor and outdoor learning materials support.
- Basic and refresher training for ECD facilitators.



- Train the ECD management committee on their role & responsibility.
- Conduct parenting education for parents.
- Organize semi-annual and annual review and sharing meeting between DDC and SC.

### Achievements

1. Increase in resource allocation from local Government of DDC and VDCs for ECD centres in Kapilvastu.
2. Between 2014 and 2016, around 80% of the ECD centres received Rs.22,542,321 from the DDC for construction and funding from the VDC for learning materials and renovations.
3. A total of 49 new ECD centres were constructed, with attached toilet and drinking water facilities as per standard design and cost sharing between DDC and Save the Children.
4. Established good coordination between Save the Children, DDC and the VDCs to increase the quality of ECD programme in Kapilvastu.
5. All constructed ECD centres are meeting government defined minimum standards.



Shivagadhi ECD: Raising from Thatched Hut

### Example

For five years, the Shivagadhi ECD centre was run from a thatched hut until it received its new building, with DDC support, in 2014. ECD facilitator, Ms. Kalpana Basnet, remembers how hard it was to manage the children and class under the roof.

“Children used to get sick often because of a lack of proper ventilation and sitting arrangement. The center had to be closed down during rainy and winter season. There was no place to arrange learning materials and most of them used to get lost.”

However, the new building has solved all the problems. Save the Children and DDC came together to support it, and the community extended its hands to share the cost in the form of labour and local building materials. The ECD now has its own building with a toilet, lots of indoor and outdoor learning materials, and seating arrangement to attract more children and satisfy parents.

“The building is safe at first. We could send our children there without hesitation,” shared Bhawana (one of the mothers). She has been sending one of her children to the centre, and feels her child has learned lots of things, including songs, and positive behaviour such as respect for elders and remaining clean. She adds, “My child never cries and is very willing to go center every day.”



Under construction of Shivagadhi ECD center

### Lessons Learned

1. The local government is taking ownership and responsibility, and is being accountable and making annual increases in the funding for the ECD programme in Kapilvastu.
2. Since beginning the cost-sharing approach with the DDC, most VDCs are allocating funds for the ECD programme at the local level.

### Challenges

1. High community expectations but low contributions.
2. The DDC is planning to construct more ECD centres but Save the Children cannot provide matching funding for all of the centres, due to limited resources.
3. Delays in construction due to strikes, heavy rain, and low community contributions.



Completed Shivagadhi ECD center



Children are enjoying in Shivagadhi ECD center

### Upcoming Plans

To increase the funds from the DDC, VDCs, and municipalities for the ECD programme.

To strengthen the system of VDC and municipality cooperation.

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All photos: Narmaya Thapa

# Innovative partnerships for sustainable early childhood development: Government leadership as the driver of success

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Early Childhood Development is a complex and multi-disciplinary field of knowledge as it encompasses a diverse range of subjects, including health, nutrition, learning and protection (Woodhead, 2006). A single stakeholder or sector on its own can do very little to make a major difference to children's development. It would also be immensely difficult for a programme initiated by a single agency to provide a comprehensive ECD programme catering to all aspects of early childhood development. Therefore, partnerships at all levels of early childhood programming are indispensable for quality outcomes, including partnerships in policy formulation, programme design and implementation. The role of partnerships at the policy level is critical not just in addressing the holistic developmental needs of children but also in integrating early childhood development into the agendas of all the sectors and thereby promoting multi-sectoral approaches to early childhood development.

At a global level, achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals [poverty reduction (Goal 1); zero hunger (nutrition-Goal 2); good health and well being (Goal 3), quality education (Goal 4); gender equality (Goal 5); decent work and economic growth (Goal 8); reduced inequalities (Goal 10); sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11); responsible consumption and

production (Goal 12); peace, justice and institutions (Goal 16); and partnerships for the goals (Goal 17)] require effective partnerships across the early childhood sectors (ARNEC 2016).

The effectiveness of early childhood development policies and programmes at the country level hinges on the extent and quality of partnerships between the key stakeholders and on cooperation across areas such as ... health, nutrition, education and protection. Partnerships must also be forged and promoted at all levels of governance and implementation. This article highlights the dynamics of such partnerships for early childhood development in the context of community-based early childhood programmes in Bhutan. It underscores the pivotal role played by the government, not just as a driver of the programme but also as a catalyst in engaging communities, families, local governments, programme implementers and development partners in meaningful partnerships for quality early childhood development programmes and in sustaining those partnerships.

It has not been very long since early childhood care and development (ECCD) programmes emerged in Bhutan and since this approach was recognised and adopted as a strategy to improve the development and well-being of young children.

Previously, early childhood programmes were understood more as early health and nutrition programmes which were integrated into adult literacy programmes with modules focussing on exclusive breast feeding, nutrition, sanitation, etc. In addition, there were a small number of preschools integrated into formal schools. These focused heavily on academics, with a highly structured curriculum and teachers with no training in early childhood education. There was no coherent or holistic understanding of early childhood development and education. A broader understanding of children's development began only with the piloting of community play groups attached to non-formal education / adult literacy programmes. By 2010 the approach had evolved to become a more inclusive and holistic community-based early childhood care and development programme.

This community-based ECD programme was conceived to focus on children aged 3 to 5 years and was accompanied by a parenting education programme addressing the age range 0-8. The programme is characterised by strong government leadership, community participation and partnerships at different levels and between a diverse range of stakeholders. Partnerships for community ECD programme in this article have two levels: macro and micro.

## 1. Macro-level Partnerships:

Macro-level partnerships are those where there is cooperation and collaboration at the national level. This comes into force particularly for the purposes of policy implementation, resource mobilisation and programmatic coordination. Central government policy requires that programmes are effectively coordinated and implemented across the whole country in a sustainable manner, with roles determined by the relevance and strength of each of the partners as follows:

### 1.1. The Development Partner

The development partner is a critical player in the partnership for early childhood



development as it provides the financial resources for the programme. Generally, the practice in many developing countries is that the development partners bring in resources, design their own programmes and implement them independently with the beneficiary communities and local governments without much involvement of central and provincial governments. While the approach is effective and efficient as long as the projects last, the challenge lies in mainstreaming such projects and securing buy-in and investment from the central and provincial governments, which is why many such programmes are not sustained beyond the end of the project period. The approach in Bhutan is unique in the sense that the projects are planned jointly by the central government and the development partners and implemented through district governments by the local governments to ensure ownership and sustainability of the programme. The development partner provides the initial investment, monitors implementation and assesses the impact of projects. This approach also ensures that the programme is mainstreamed in the process of implementation.

### 1.2. The Central Government

The role of the central government in this model of partnership is pivotal in identifying needs, mobilizing resources, instituting a system of delivery and engaging provincial governments in the implementation of the programme. The central government also lays out minimum standards and requirements, in line with national policy. The central government (the nodal agency for ECD) carries out needs assessments and works closely with the development partners in prioritizing investment and allocating resources, through in the form of annual plans of action.

### 1.3. The District Government

The district government is instrumental in identifying and expressing the needs of the communities. The district government also works with the local authorities in establishing and maintaining community-based ECD centres. The district government recruits and appoints ECD facilitators and sensitises communities, in partnership with the Ministry of Education. The district government also has the mandate to budget for the maintenance of ECD centres and capacity building of facilitators.



### 1.4. The Local Government (Gewog)

The local government is the main stakeholder as it takes ultimate ownership of community-based ECD centres. It ensures that the programme runs well and that each centre is sustainable. The most important function of the local government is to work directly with the people to mobilise them to support ECD programmes. The local government also provides additional funds for the establishment of centres when necessary. In the process of establishing new centres, the role of the local government is central not just in ensuring effective coordination within the community but also in taking responsibility to establish it completely.

### 2. Micro-level Partnerships

Micro-level partnerships are those that form the collaboration and support system that exists within each ECD centre, which contribute to the effective operation and management of each centre and its programmes. Partnership at the micro level contributes to ensuring the quality and sustainability of the programme, through involvement of all key stakeholders, including families, local schools and health and nutrition services, thus addressing the need for holistic ECD. Each of the players contributes in ways that support the programme in critical areas and complement what other players have to offer. An ECD centre typically has a management committee chaired by the local government leader such as the Gup (Head of Local government) to manage the centre.

### 2.1. The Families and Parents

Families and parents are the chief stakeholders and beneficiaries of the ECD centres, and hence their participation is central to the success of the programme. Parents not only participate in the parenting education programme and material development sessions conducted at the centres, but also contribute as parent volunteers in assisting the facilitators and members of the management committee at the centres. The centres also recognize and value the knowledge that families bring to the programme as learning resources for children and encourage them to teach songs, stories, arts and crafts activities at the centres. Families therefore play a crucial role in making the ECD programme locally relevant through the infusion of local language and culture into the programme at the centres.

### 2.2. The Local Primary School

In each locality, a primary school is identified as the parent school of the ECD centre, to provide guidance, supervision and professional support to the centre, considering the availability of professional capacity in the school. The school also monitors the centre. This affiliation ensures the support system necessary for the ECD centre and professional development support for the facilitators. Each school principal acts as the secretary to the management committee of their ECD centre.

### 2.3. Health Workers

The community health workers play an equally important role in supporting the ECD centres. In addition to providing health advice and services to children at the centres, including growth monitoring, dental and health checkups and sanitation and nutritional guidance, health workers also conduct parenting education sessions, particularly those related to health and nutrition. Health workers are also important members of the centre management committees.

### 2.4. The Local Government Office (Gewog)

The Gewogs are headed by Gups, who chair the ECD centre management committees, and act as the primary owners of the centres. The Gewog coordinates initiatives related to the centre and mobilises the whole community. The Gewogs are also responsible for the maintenance of the ECD centres, and also provide resources as and when necessary to ensure the quality and sustainability of the centres. The support that a Gewog is able to provide or not provide, is pivotal to the quality, success and sustainability of an ECD centre, as the other stakeholders cannot make much difference in the absence of the critical leadership and support of the Gewog.

### Conclusion

The community-based early childhood development programme in Bhutan depends on effective partnerships between key stakeholders at various levels in the provision of holistic early childhood development services. Each of the partners plays a role relevant to its strengths and contributes collectively to the holistic quality early childhood development programme. As all the partners participate in and contribute to the programme, they have a strong sense of ownership and concern for the programme, thereby



making every possible effort to ensure that the programme works well, sustains and benefits their children and themselves. The building blocks of strong partnerships and participation in every community, backed by enabling government policy and support systems, are reasons why sustainable early childhood development programmes have emerged and flourished across the country.

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## Deconstruction of the ‘taken for granted’ practices in the early years education in Bhutan

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### Summary

This paper is extracted from the author’s Ph.D thesis titled, “Examining funds of knowledge as children transition from home to school in Bhutan.” The discussion presents the researcher’s perspectives and concepts that are believed to be relevant and much needed for the deconstruction of the ‘taken for granted’ practices of early years education in Bhutan. Observing the present lack of alignment between the school and the home, it is essential for educators to be aware that whatever home a child comes from there is knowledge that can be harnessed and extended to support children’s learning in the classroom.

### Introduction

The motivation for this research began with my personal experiences of schooling two sons. Observing their distress at the start of school was a very painful and unhappy experience for me and my family. Even though 25 years have passed, I still observe a similar discomfort and reluctance among some children at the beginning of school. I have always wondered why. Why do children experience such anxieties, when they were initially full of enthusiasm to begin schooling?

Most of us in the field of education quite rightly quote, ‘home is the first school’. I always wondered what and how children of Bhutan in the 21st century learn in their first

learning environment - the home. Are there differences between the home and school that cause the discomfort that most children feel at the start of their formal schooling in the pre-primary (PP) classroom?

I then came across Moll and his colleagues’ work on ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). They defined ‘funds of knowledge’ as a “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential to household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al., 1992, p.134). We describe home as the first school and the parents as the first teachers. I then wondered what these skills and knowledge could be in a Bhutanese household. Through the theoretical lens of ‘funds of knowledge’,



the study revealed deep and important insights into the home, the community and the school that could improve early years education in Bhutan.

My inquiry into the household 'funds of knowledge' of four families in central Bhutan provided me with the most enriching and sensitizing experience of my whole career as a teacher educator. My investigations made me aware of the rich repositories of knowledge that each of the families and their children possessed and which served them well in their lives. Fleer (2003, p. 65) urges us to "critically examine our own profession and question what we have inherited from our forbears, the histories that we re-enact with each generation of early childhood teachers, and deconstruct the 'taken for granted' practices that plague the field." In the rest of the paper, I share six pertinent areas of consideration that I believe will have implications for professionals involved in the education of young children.

### Micro culture and the macro culture

The concept of 'culture' that I understood at the beginning of this study encompassed a much broader perspective that was derived from the observed and tangible markers of customs, beliefs, food and festivals. Such markers or the macro culture are very much a part of the school curriculum. However, culture as understood from a 'funds of knowledge' perspective is more significantly a way of using the social, physical, spiritual and economic resources available for an individual's benefit. As I delved deeper and focused and refocused my lens of 'funds of knowledge', I began to realize that the meaning of culture in this context particularly meant each child's individual household culture. Gonzalez et al. (2005, p. 25) assert that by moving away from the "stereotypical notions of culture" we "can come to a deeper appreciation of the dynamic and emergent conditions of the lived experiences". Thus to develop a deeper understanding of this micro culture and to preserve and promote it, the most important place to begin is the home.

Understanding a household culture reveals how, over the years, individual practices and beliefs have been passed from generation to generation. Each household has a unique and rich micro culture that contributes to, and underpins, the overall richness of the macro culture. By viewing household cultures through the lens of 'funds of knowledge', it shifted my understanding of culture as

integrated and harmonious, to culture being dynamic and changing. Understanding this more dynamic perspective of culture is essential for the individual's functioning and wellbeing and should be part and parcel of the early years education system.

### Households as repositories of knowledge rather than depositories of knowledge

Researchers who believe in the potential of every household describe households as repositories of knowledge believing that individuals, households and communities have skills, strengths and knowledge that can be usefully shared. However, in Bhutan, the general opinion of most households, especially of the villagers, farmers and the illiterates, is that they lack knowledge. Such deficit views became more evident through the focus group conversations that I had with the 25 pre-primary school teachers, who claimed that the children who came from the villages and from parents who were not literate 'knew nothing' when they first came to their classes. As a consequence they had to 'teach them everything'. Moll et al. (1992) and Gonzalez (1995) explain the blaming of the underachievement of ethnic minority groups in schools on perceived deficiencies relating to the minority students themselves, their families and their cultures as "deficit theorizing". When the prevailing belief is that incoming students suffer from lack of knowledge then schools try to address the deficits by depositing knowledge into children. On the contrary, my inquiry into Bhutanese households revealed to me the rich and varied repositories of knowledge both the families and their children possessed; knowledge that the schools and the teacher training colleges could use in providing a much more meaningful education.

### A zone of comfort (ZoC) rather than a zone of discomfort (ZoD)

Researchers such as Zipin (2009), Thomas and Hall (2008), Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992) and Moll and Greenberg (1990) have drawn attention to the pedagogy evident in the households and the community and the rich 'funds of knowledge' experienced by the children. Many of them observed that households and the community provide multiple domains within which a child can experiment, where error is not dealt with punitively and where self-esteem is not endangered, a situation that Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992) describe as the

'zone of comfort'. It is a basis of *confianza* built through the thick multi-stranded relationships and the adaptive, active flexible networks that place children within an appropriate cultural frame for adulthood. On the other hand, learning in the school is more directed and the typical teacher-student relationship is thin and single-stranded, based on their limited classroom context. The teacher hardly attempts to draw on the child's 'funds of knowledge'. During the early years of schooling when children experience the transition from home to school, it is important that schools use the appropriate knowledge and skills to support children to have a pleasant and meaningful start in the pre-primary classes.

### A zone of proximal development (ZPD) rather than a zone of under development (ZUD)

Vygotsky (1987,1978) defines a zone of proximal development (ZPD) as the distance between the actual development level, as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. From a Vygotskian perspective, teaching and learning is useful as long as it is ahead of development and thus stirs up developing functions in the child's zone of proximal development. A teacher's main responsibility is to identify the student's ZPD and provide developmentally appropriate instruction. To do this the teacher has to have a sound knowledge of the child and his or her household 'funds of knowledge' on which they can build the school experience.

Greenberg (1989) defines a setting that does not tap into the richness of individual's 'funds of knowledge' as a 'zone of under-development' (ZUD). Children in such an environment who regularly perform activities below their capabilities, being treated as knowing nothing, run the risk of becoming unable to perform to their full potential. During my role as a participant-observer in the pre-primary class, I observed the teacher regularly carrying out activities in the class as directed by their curriculum, activities that usually follow a "one size fits all" principle. If the teacher knew how much children already knew, she could have provided them with much more relevant and challenging work that would allow them to function at a more advanced level within their ZPD.

## Parents as partners rather than clients

To support a smooth transition from home to school and to make learning meaningful for a child, the role of parents as partner is sine qua non. (Moll et al., 1992; Moll and Greenberg, 1990; Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg, 1992) advocate the significance of 'funds of knowledge' in a child's life, sharing the importance of viewing learning as participation in a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998) rather than an individual activity of learning to read and write. Such a view can shift our preoccupation with what parents should do for the school, towards an attempt to understand differences between the home, community and the school that can inform curriculum practices. Even if nothing else came out of such partnerships, at least it could prevent teachers from making false judgments about the children and their families. These experiences provide a way to transcend all boundaries for both teachers and parents, not simply for gathering information from each other, but more to develop an enduring, reciprocal and genuine partnership for better education of the child.

## Schooling as an enculturation process rather than an adulteration process

The acceptance of parents as partners in educating their children is an enculturation process. Teachers have to juggle two conflicting requirements in their profession. There is an obligation to teach children what we need to have them do and an obligation to value what they can do, the competencies that each child brings with them. Brennan (2007, p. 7) calls this task of connecting the two as 'enculturation' a term that he defines as the "ability to respond emotionally to children and to appropriate cultural tools and practices in a way that connects children to their social and cultural contexts".

The typical notion of learning as an individual process with a beginning and an end, that can be separated from other activities and is a product of teaching, is an outdated concept that can in certain circumstances lower the quality of education. Children enter school with a variety of 'virtual bags' (Thomson & Hall, 2008) and, sadly, schools choose to open only those bags that have contents matching the game of schooling. Those who have no opportunity to open their bags run the risk of not being able to comply with the demands of the school and the teacher.

Central to Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory is that a child learns best when teachers create instructions that use the child's 'funds of knowledge' for learning new knowledge and practices that validate their experiences. Researchers and educationists have confirmed time after time that no single curriculum is appropriate for deciding what should be taught in school and questions of which curriculum and which textbooks are trivial, unless enacted within the framework of the children's lives.

## Conclusion

This paper discusses the key issues that can guide us towards ways of improving transition and the early years of our children's education. I believe that recognition of children's 'funds of knowledge' is a vital component for supporting children's education, particularly in the early years. People cannot be separated from their social world for they are knitted together and their spheres of influence overlap and form comprehensive ecological systems that interact with one another. Therefore, if each of the six areas addressed above are acted upon, either individually or, better still, collectively, they have the potential to radically improve the quality of the early childhood experience and programmes.

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# Getting it together for parents and whanau in New Zealand

**Joanne Alderson and Donna Kenny, Lecturers Bachelor of Teaching ECE, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand**

Four early childhood education (ECE) centres in New Zealand were the focal point of a research project (Alderson & Kenny, in progress) investigating the interorganisational partnerships between teaching teams and outside professionals.

These partnerships were intended to benefit young children and their families. Qualitative data were gathered from early childhood teachers, parents and professionals from the outside organisations. A preliminary survey of 88 ECE services was also undertaken to gain a picture of the professional partnerships between early childhood services and other organisations working with the same families.

## The New Zealand context

In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education administers policies for all types of ECE services. Another contextual feature is that educational organisations serving children and families are almost all self-governing entities. Teams must initiate professional partnerships individually.

Despite there being no regulatory requirement for partnerships between organisations, there is a clear indication from the Ministry of Education that partnerships are desirable and can create positive outcomes for children.

The ECE curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996, p42), contains the following statement:

*Children's learning and development are fostered if the wellbeing of their family and community is supported; if their family, culture, knowledge and community are respected; and if there is a strong connection and consistency among all aspects of the child's world.*

A key aspect of this research was to question how this was applied in practice to interorganisational partnership work in early childhood education.

## Parents as partners

While the focus of the research was on the partnerships between ECE centres and outside agencies, children and their parents/*whanau* are at the heart of these partnerships.

Treat and Hartenstine (2013, p73) in their work on strategic partnerships found:

*Fully developed partnerships demonstrate shared goal setting, development of trust and relationships, cooperative processes, decision making that is built on collaboration and partner strengths, shared responsibility, and shared results. Such partnerships result in function-driven communication, as opposed to hierarchical systems, and increased performance due to integration of activities.*

Participants in this research identified many of these aspects as being in place and contributing to partnerships. It was clear from the survey data, and more so from the case studies, that trust, communication and relationship building were key to positive outcomes for parents and families as regards interorganisational partnerships. This article therefore focuses on parents' experiences with regard to these elements and their impact on children's transitions from prenatal to 8 years in their community.

## Parents' experience – the challenges

It is critical that in their role in interagency partnerships, ECE services allow parents to take part in the decisions and interactions that affect their families.

"I guess if other agencies are involved I kind of want to know who they are and what they are doing, what the benefit is for your child and where the information goes," said one parent.

The research identified two broad types of interagency relationships: those that are transactional (typically of short duration); and those that are transformative for a child's education and health.

The first type included activities such as seeing the police community constable, school health checks, and car seat safety checks. Both ECE teachers and parents generally saw these types of partnerships as nonproblematic. They usually involved a visit to the centre and the benefits for children were apparent to families and teachers. For example, one ECE teacher said, "the fire, ambulance and police are great at having a supportive partnership."

Parents reported that they appreciated the range of different activities from which children could gain experiential learning. One parent shared how the centre had followed up on her child's interest in visiting the library, where she now takes the child every weekend.

Some of the benefits of these transactional relationships had a wider reach than the children involved. In one centre, a visit from the eczema nurse had a spinoff effect when a parent shared health advice from the nurse with her own mother: "I turned around and told my mum; my 17 year old sister has had bad eczema all her life and now my sister is doing a lot better."

However, it was in the arena of transformative interagency partnerships – those that could transform educational and health outcomes for children – that the greatest benefits and the greatest challenges were reported. Examples of transformative partnerships included those with local schools, local *marae* and *kaumatua*, and government agencies.

An example of transformative partnerships was evident in the transition to school partnerships which were often well established and involved supporting parents as well as children. One centre describes

their role as: “Networking re our initiatives, transitioning children, visits on a weekly basis from the local new entrant class, visits to the school library, supporting parents by going to school when they are enrolling if they are unsure, making transitions plans and having meetings with junior teachers if a child will require extra support but isn’t currently on [government organisation] books.”

While there are challenges in creating strong relationships, respondents generally viewed the outcomes positively. One new entrant teacher said: “I definitely know that the outcomes are better because we don’t have issues at all. We have had 40+ through our door this year and we have not had one child that has been an issue in terms of parent anxiety... because we have an open door policy.”

Challenges in establishing and maintaining interagency relationships were more often encountered where there was a sensitive element, such as money or child behavioural issues. Parents from one centre perceived an issue between early childhood centres and a government funding agency in relation to childcare subsidies. “The day-care doesn’t communicate enough with [the government funding agency], and only when they realised that payments hadn’t been coming through correctly then we get the bill. [The agency] won’t pay it even if it’s their muck up and as single parents we just can’t afford that, and there is just not enough understanding or care when it comes to that situation... so I think the only thing they need to work on is communication.”

The importance of communication was apparent not only between ECE centres and outside agencies, but also between centres and parents. Many parents stated they were unsure of which agencies were available to young families, and unsure how to find out. A parent focus group said that they did not always know which outside organisations were involved with their children.

One parent said this awareness was “especially important for first time parents like myself; you go into it blind, you don’t really know... my son is eighteen months old and I’m still learning about all the things that are available and what help you can get from various agencies and centres.”

## Parents’ experiences – the benefits

Although concerns were raised about the challenges of interagency relationships, it was clear that many centres were doing an excellent job of facilitating and maintaining these relationships.

For those that were working well, there was a great deal of appreciation from parents towards centres that made contact with outside agencies on their behalf. This raised some interesting comments, as these were often informal connections driven by the needs of a child or their *whanau* at the time. They were sometimes driven by a request from a parent or a direct offer of assistance from an ECE teacher. One ECE head teacher, for example, phoned a new entrant teacher about an anxious parent, “She said ‘Look, would you mind if I come and do the visits with the mum?’ and I said ‘of course’. So the ECE teacher came along and the mum; it was more about the mum and not the girl.”

Other centres reported assisting families with applications to outside agencies, calling on their behalf “when they lack confidence”, and calling to clarify agency criteria or the status of an application for support.

Trust was critical in establishing these links, with ECE teachers noting that parents would often share information with them first. “For many families we are the first contact with professionals outside of the family,” said an ECE teacher, “and it is important they build up a trust and understanding that there are services available and it is OK to ask and seek advice and guidance.” In a powerful statement, another ECE teacher provided insight into how far-reaching these effects can be for parents: “They feel that we value them and their aspirations. They feel supported by us, as we can access current info, give feedback and direct them. They feel at times that they are doing a better job if we can empower them.”

Another important area of successful partnerships was support for children with behavioural or additional learning needs. This went beyond simply referring children or families to an agency; it also involved a meaningful contribution of the ECE teachers’ knowledge of the child: “We are able to give some insight into how the child behaves, responds and communicates

to these other organisations,” said one teacher. This sort of relationship could be crucial when children transitioned to school, as otherwise information could be lost. In order to encourage “good health and wellbeing, school transition and education success” said one ECE teacher, it was important to work with families “to pass on the trust that has been established and to support them to work [with] new agencies that can further support them.”

For all children, regardless of individual circumstances, continuity and consistency in service provision, and communication between organisations were critical. “There is an expectation,” explained one ECE teacher, “that as a result of these contacts there will be informed shared strategies used by *whanau*, teaching team, [and] agency when interacting with children, resulting in a seamless consistent approach.”

## The way forward

Parents shared many practical ways to improve their experience of interagency partnerships. In early childhood centres just beginning to develop partnerships, parents communicated the need for a key liaison in each agency. They felt this would provide consistency of communication, relieving the frustration of parents having to share the same information repeatedly. It would mean, said one parent, “you can get to know [the liaison] and you’ll know that what you’ve talked about last time, you’re not going to have to repeat yourself; they know what’s going on with that child.” One group of parents proposed having a designated community link person within the childcare centre to provide time for them to discuss their needs: “It would probably be good if you know on one particular day that you could actually catch up with someone for 10 minutes.”

Parents also expressed a desire for easier access to pamphlets and other resources through the ECE centre, particularly in regard to health. They wanted written information to take home and read in their own time. Some suggested that a website listing resources/agencies, organised by geographical region, would be helpful.

There is limited research on inter-organisational partnership work in ECE in New Zealand. In other jurisdictions in the



Western world, interdisciplinary children's centres have been established with government funding to help mitigate the impact of social change on young families. The literature from these countries "argues that integrated services, where a range of professionals, including early childhood professionals, work together in teams, offer a potentially highly effective strategy for providing families with access to a range of services in a seamless 'joinedup' way." (Press, Sumison & Wong, 2012, p18).

Parents' experiences in this New Zealand study affirm this is the case. Their contributions make it clear that they want to be partners in their children's education and care.

There is more work to be done to ensure that relationships between early childhood settings, child/family/*whanau*, and outside agencies are developed to create this sense of partnership and the strength that results from it. As one ECE teacher puts it: "Children benefit from the support of their community at many levels. They should not be left to struggle because the adults around them have not made professional partnerships."

## Glossary

Translations of Maori into English taken from Ryan<sup>4</sup>

*Iwi* tribe

*Kaumātua* old man, elder

*marae* meeting area of *whanau* or *iwi*, focal point of settlement, central area of village and its buildings, courtyard

*whanau* extended family

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# Connecting teachers' and school leaders' roles to support children's transition from preschools into primary schooling in disadvantaged districts in Vietnam

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## Transition in the Vietnamese Context

The Government of Vietnam provides public preschool education to children aged from 3 to 5. Primary schooling starts at the age of 6. Among children of preschool age, the gross enrolment rate (GER) is 81%. The adjusted net enrolment ratio (ANER) is 95% for 5-year-olds in preschool education, while in primary education the GER is 109% and the ANER is 98% (UNESCO, 2016). In Vietnam, primary schooling is often considered the starting point of more formal education. Moving into this new environment signifies a process of change and adaptation, not only for children, but also for their families and schools.

In general, when children go through a transition process from home or preschool into primary schooling around the age of 6, they go through a critical period that can impact their further development and learning. At that moment, their educational life changes in many ways. Firstly, they are confronted with a completely new school environment, secondly, they experience a different pedagogical approach and face high expectations from teachers and parents. They also have to deal with a new social identity. From being the oldest and most expert children in preschool, they have now become the youngest and least experienced members of the primary school community. Furthermore, as children enter primary school, they also enter an entirely new social network in which they have to develop new friendships and relationships with new peers and older children. In addition, children move from an informal learning setting with a central focus on incidental learning through play, to a formal and intentional education setting (Akhter et al, 2012; Fabian and Dunlop, 2007; Myers, 1997). All these changes are observed in Vietnam, where preschools and primary schools tend to operate separately, in two unconnected worlds. Although these changes are generally in line with child development milestones set around the age of 6, children develop differently and respond to these changes in their own unique ways.

Within the Vietnamese education system, this critical transition period tends to have an especially negative effect on the wellbeing and involvement of the more vulnerable children. Those children often live in disadvantaged, difficult-to-access or disaster-prone areas and include many children of ethnic minority descent (MOET, 2013). They experience more barriers to learning and participation and these are evident in their access to preschool as well as primary school. These barriers can relate to linguistic differences and late or irregular attendance at preschool education services, as well as to incongruence between the expectations of schools in relation to parental involvement on the one

Cooperation and Technical Assistance (WOB) introduced to Vietnamese teachers and school leaders the WOB transition approach, a comprehensive approach to enable them to better support children in their transition from preschool to primary school. VVOB is an organisation currently operating in nine developing countries and is specialised in improving the quality of local education systems.

In partnership with the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training and education experts at both national and provincial level, VVOB Vietnam formulated a common definition of 'transition'. In this context, transition is understood as a process



side and the parental expectations on the other (Booth and Ainscow, 2016; Dockett and Perry, 2007). This is problematic as it strongly impacts on children's further learning and development in the years to come (Laevers, 2011).

## Overcoming barriers: A joint effort

School leaders, teachers and parents all play a critical role in supporting children to overcome the difficulties and barriers that go with the transition period. In its 2014-2016 programme on early childhood education, the Flemish Association for Development

experienced by children aged between 5 and 8 that is embedded in a continuum of multiple changes, during which the child trades a familiar for a new educational environment (VVOB Vietnam, 2014). This definition currently serves as a basis for context-appropriate practices addressing transition throughout Vietnam.

In line with UNICEF's concept of school readiness (UNICEF 2012), VVOB's transition approach addresses each of the three dimensions of the readiness triangle: (i) ready schools that provide powerful learning environments to preschool and

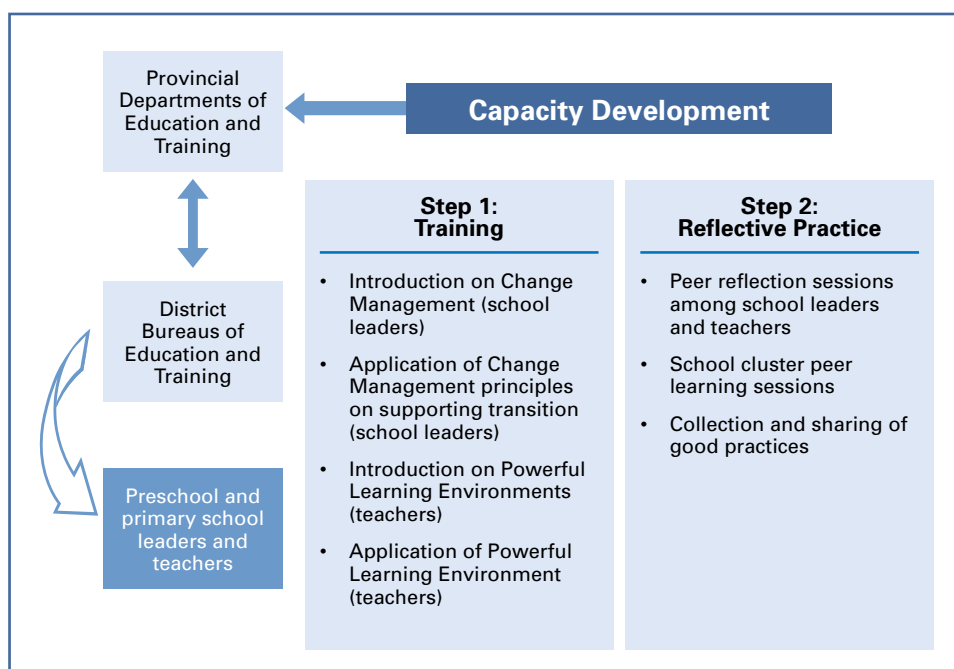


Figure 1. Sharing changed practices: main structure of the capacity development trajectory in Tan Ky and Tra Bong.



primary school children; (ii) ready families with parental engagement in children's learning and development at home; and (iii) ready children who are able to develop to their full potential. In a successful transition approach, school leaders and teachers translate 'school readiness' to the local context of children.

Both preschool and primary school teachers are key in providing appropriate learning opportunities for all children to become involved and develop into lifelong learners, despite their different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. They do so by offering powerful learning environments in the classroom, characterised by a positive

and safe class climate and meaningful and functional tasks and activities. They also offer children development-appropriate impulses through scaffolding and interactional support (Verhelst, 2006). The role of school leaders is equally important as they are generally the driving force behind setting up mechanisms that support children, their parents and involved teachers throughout this crucial transition stage. They also play a crucial role in connecting preschool and primary schools by bringing teachers together and in linking schools with the local communities. As the next section shows, the roles of school teachers and leaders are crucial in building capacity for supporting children's transition.

### Capacity development for teachers and leaders

Between May 2014 and May 2016, VVOB Vietnam worked with the provincial departments and district bureaus of education and training of four provinces (Nghe An, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai and Thai Nguyen). This support aimed at developing the latter's capacities in supporting teachers and school leaders involved in children's transition. Both the departments and bureaus are crucial actors in the set-up and development of local education policies. Hence, VVOB Vietnam applied a variety of capacity development methods, including training, workshops, coaching, different

forms of peer learning and review, and harvesting and sharing of experiences. A diagram of the capacity development model is shown in Figure 1.

After two years, the capacity development process at the provincial and district levels resulted in changed practices in schools in many of the participating districts. The Tan Ky and Tra Bong Districts are among the most disadvantaged areas in Vietnam. Practices from Tan Ky District in Nghe An Province and from Tra Bong district in Quang Ngai Province showcase the changes in school leaders' and teachers' approaches to transition. Their practices illustrate how teachers and school leaders of preschools and primary schools gradually increase their collaboration, learn to appreciate each other's work, exchange experiences and start bridging their classroom practices. In these districts, school leaders and teachers have also connected with parents, who are crucial partners in overcoming barriers to children's smooth transition.

### Valuing diversity in Tan Ky

In Tan Ky, a mountainous district in Nghe An Province, 18% of the population belongs to various ethnic minority groups. In total, there are 24 preschools and 26 primary schools in the district. Similar to other areas in Vietnam, the issue of transition was not given much consideration before 2014 and collaboration between pre-schools and primary schools was very limited. Following two years of programme implementation, local practices show that the district education officers are now capable of better supporting their school leaders and teachers in developing new transition practices.

In 2014, two district education officers participated in a provincial training on school leadership, which introduced Change Management as a way to support transition. The education officers, in turn, replicated the training for all preschool and primary school leaders in their district. After the training, two additional actions were taken: (i) school leaders shared the training content with their staff, raising the awareness of all staff of supporting pre-school to primary transition and of actions they can undertake to support children during this process; (ii) the district Bureau of Education and Training issued official guidelines for schools to guide them in their next steps of official implementation of the practices. These actions equally targeted both preschools and primary schools.



In addition, preschool and primary school teachers were also trained in supporting children in transition, through a Powerful Learning Environment in 2015. They learned how to establish a positive and safe climate in the classrooms, how to develop meaningful and functional tasks and activities, and also how to provide interactional support and scaffolding in order to maximize the development and learning of their children. Following the trainings, schools designed and implemented a variety of new initiatives to change their regular practices of supporting children in transition.

Following implementation of their initiatives, preschools and primary schools exchanged experiences in two cluster sessions in 2015 and 2016. During these peer learning sessions, school leaders and teachers shared what they had done since the training, what they had planned for the final month of the school year, what they had learned from these new experiences and what initiatives they were preparing for the upcoming school years.

This exchange continued in 2015/16 and a variety of changed practices could be identified through peer learning and sharing. In the 26 primary schools and 24 preschools of Tan Ky District, schools of both levels collaborated according to their geographical location and developed a joint transition cooperation plan. Preschool and primary teachers observed each other's lessons to better understand what happens in the other classroom setting. Preschools and primary schools also jointly organized activities for parents to inform them on how they can support children during the transition. In addition, highlighting a ritual of transition, schools improved the existing formal hand-over of children from preschool to primary school. In their current practice, they have included their last preschool teacher and their new grade one teacher in the ritual of welcoming the children to the new school. Preschools also organised a visit for their children to a primary grade one class during the final month of preschool.

### Connecting schools with parents in Tra Bong

Tra Bong is a mountainous district in Quang Ngai province where about 44% of the population belong to ethnic minority groups. In addition to joint activities between preschools and primary schools (many of them similar to the Tan Ky practices) schools in Tra Bong developed interesting

transition practices to strengthen the crucial connection between schools and children's parents and other family caregivers.

Schools and local parenting education clubs of the Vietnam Women's Union worked together. Joint cooperation plans were developed between preschools, primary schools and local Women's Union clubs. Women's Union volunteers visited both school levels to better understand children's involvement and learning. The Women's Union and schools also jointly organized orientation sessions for parents on parental involvement during the transition period. School representatives regularly participated in parenting education sessions organized by the Women's Union for parents in the community. These included sessions on developing children's confidence and independence, stimulating language development, familiarizing children with mathematics and the surrounding world, and supporting children's physical development.

### Conclusion

Practices in Tan Ky, Tra Bong and other participating districts show how teachers and school leaders can play a crucial role in smoothing children's transition from preschool into primary education. Over the last two years, cooperation between the schools from the two education levels has fostered mutual respect and understanding. This has led to better knowledge of the other's education service. Participating preschools and primary schools gradually expanded their collaboration, learned to appreciate each other's work, exchanged experiences and started bridging their classroom practices. In the districts, school leaders and teachers have also connected with parents, who are similarly crucial partners in smoothing children's transitions.

School leaders are now known to emphasize the importance of transition and pay due attention to addressing these challenges in their schools. Teachers on both levels have learned from each other and implement changes inspired by their new insights. Schools are more likely to engage parents in meaningful transition rituals, positively valuing all children and their parents. Children's experiences during the process of transition are changing from experiencing anxiety and stress to feeling safe, nurtured and supported, and progress reports from district and provincial education officers indicate that, compared to previous years, children appear more

confident and independent as they start their primary school life.

Based on the experiences in these districts, education leaders from Nghe An and Quang Ngai provinces as well as from the Department of Teachers and Educational Administrators of the Ministry of Education and Training have planned to scale-up the VVOB transition approach regionally and nationally across Vietnam.

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# Level playing field: Holistic early childhood development (ECD) services for disadvantaged children in Timor-Leste

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## Introduction

The importance of seamless transitions in early childhood services is implied in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 4.2 which states: “By 2030 ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education” (United Nations, 2015). This goal was informed by the growing evidence base of the impact of quality early childhood interventions on brain development, school readiness and school achievement (Neuman and Hatipoglu, 2015). Given the multi-sectoral nature of early childhood services, maintaining continuity between the child’s first teachers (their family members), their pre-primary teachers and primary school teachers is essential to meeting their developmental needs.

The purpose of this paper is to present key features of the holistic early childhood development (ECD) services supported by UNICEF Timor-Leste in partnership with the government of Timor-Leste, and local and international NGOs. The article addresses the following questions:

1. *What is the current status of children in early years and their parents, and what are the corresponding policies which support them?*
2. *What are the goals and features of the UNICEF supported early childhood interventions, and what are some possible ways to combine them?*
3. *What are the issues surrounding combined ECD service delivery and sustainability?*

## Background

Timor-Leste (also known as East Timor) gained independence from Portugal in 1975 and was invaded by Indonesia within a few months. After independence was restored in Timor-Leste in 2002, the country became the youngest country in Asia. In 2002, Timor-Leste’s infrastructure, including school buildings, was in ruins

and many trained professionals, including teachers, had left the country (Sandos, 2013). It is commendable that 14 years after independence, Timor-Leste has made steady developmental progress. The child and infant mortality rates have been reduced by half; access to health and education services significantly increased; and state institutions strengthened (World Bank, 2016). This was made possible by channeling money from the Petroleum Fund into the budget to meet pressing needs (World Bank, 2016). However, 49.9 percent of households still live below the poverty line (ADB, 2016).

Poverty greatly impacts on Timorese children. The *Situation Analysis of Children* (2014) indicates that 50 percent of deaths of children under 5 were caused by preventable diseases. More than 50 percent of children under 5 are stunted, 39 percent of houses have access to improved sanitation facilities and 35 percent of schools lack basic sanitation facilities (UNICEF, 2014). Limited data is available on the use of violence against children but several studies have highlighted the use of corporal punishment both at home and in school (UNICEF, 2014).

The East Asia-Pacific Early Childhood Development Scales (2014), a common measurement tool to assess the holistic developmental progress of children aged 3-5 years, showed that Timor-Leste children’s development was ranked among the lowest in the region. National education statistics show that 84.5 percent of children do not have access to preschools while parental knowledge on the importance of early stimulation is low, quality of teaching and learning in preschools is poor, learning and teaching materials are not available, untrained teachers are using inappropriate teaching practices, and there are few books for literacy and language learning in rural areas (EFA, 2015). Existing challenges noted in primary schools include children starting school when they are too old, dropping out of school, and children taking too many years to complete their

primary schooling (EFA, 2015). As part of their effort to address education concerns, the government aims to expand access to preschools to all children by 2030.

Participation in early learning programmes helps children to be ready for formal schooling. Students who have attended pre-primary learning programmes are less likely to repeat a grade and have better education achievement (Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani, Shallwani, 2008). With few children in Timor-Leste accessing preschool education, one in three children enrolling in Grade 1 for the first time end up having to repeat the grade (EMIS, 2014). The dropout rate in Grade 1 is 3.3 percent, the highest dropout rate across the whole education cycle, covering Grades 1 to 9 (EMIS, 2014).

## The Programmes

Through the valuable support of the H&M Conscious Foundation, New Zealand Aid, the Government of Norway and other development partners, UNICEF is working with the Government of Timor-Leste to strengthen capacities and knowledge of families through parenting education, to support implementing alternative preschool models and to improve access to and the quality of basic education.

### Parenting Programme

Together with the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MSS), UNICEF has identified the development of a holistic caregiver education programme as an opportunity to strengthen parenting skills and to improve



children's nutrition, health, education, care and protection. The programme was created based on an extensive baseline study conducted by UNICEF on parental knowledge, attitudes and practices. The programme targeted 30,000 vulnerable children aged 0–8 as well as their parents and caregivers. The programme modules covered topics relating to health, nutrition, education and child's rights, which impact children from conception up to the late teen years. The programme also included general parenting modules, which emphasised the importance of a father's role in parenting, positive discipline, and the importance of early stimulation such as singing, telling stories, talking to their children, holding them, smiling and making eye contact. Parents are also taught how to make toys using locally available materials.

The parenting education programme is conducted by MSS staff who have been trained as facilitators, thereby building their capacity and increasing the sustainability of the project. The programme is delivered through a three-tiered approach:

- 1) **Targeted approaches** such as *parenting education sessions*. These take place at the village level every three months and cover one key message each time. These employ interactive learner-centred, activity-based approaches.
- 2) **Intensive approaches** such as *home visits*, to ensure that families receive targeted support. The different approaches are employed to ensure messages are reinforced over time.
- 3) **Non-targeted approaches** such as community radio and youth theatre. *Community radio* targets all parents, prospective parents and caregivers in the district. Since radios are still the primary source of information in villages, this approach is the easiest way to disseminate knowledge to remote locations. *Youth theatre* is conducted by community theatre groups who model positive parenting behaviours. This also gives young people the opportunity to affect behaviour change in their communities.

### Preschool Programme

In addition to the above initiatives, a National Policy Framework for Preschool Education, developed with the support of UNICEF and other development partners, was adopted in 2014. The framework recognises the importance of preschool

education and aims to expand access to all children aged 3–5 by 2030. In order to address the same aims to raise participation rates, the Ministry of Education (MOE), with UNICEF support, is following a two-pronged approach: a) establishing public pre-schools attached to UNICEF-supported Child-Friendly Basic Education Schools, and b) expanding coverage through alternative preschool models.



The alternative preschools focus on play-based learning through artwork and story-telling. ©UNICEF Timor-Leste/2016/dmonemnasi

- a) **Formal Preschool Programme:** Support for public preschool interventions includes: provision of teaching-learning materials; teacher recruitment and training; assistance with the national preschool curriculum; construction of preschools that have Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities and provision of school furniture; capacity building and awareness raising of parents and communities; and capacity building of district education authorities.
- b) **Alternative Preschool Programme:** UNICEF is working closely with the Ministry of Education to pilot alternative delivery modes for preschool learning in remote and disadvantaged districts. Three alternative delivery modes are being modelled:

- 1) **Community-based preschools**, for communities which have between 500 and 1,000 people, usually close to major roads, and have access to administrative centres and services. Preschool classes are conducted in community centres.
- 2) **Home-based preschools** which are for communities with between 100 and 500 people with limited access to roads and other types of infrastructure. Preschool classes are conducted in the facilitator's or sub-village head's home porch.

- 3) **Individual family preschools** for families who live in extremely remote and scattered hillside communities. The preschool classes here are conducted by parents within their homes. Parents receive training and learning materials by the trainer during home visits.

UNICEF has partnered with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to conduct training of alternative preschool facilitators, who were selected by the community. The facilitators receive pre-service and in-service training on child-centred pedagogy, classroom management and how to teach the government approved preschool curriculum. Classes are conducted in the child's mother tongue, and tetum-language is introduced for an easy transition into primary grades. The programme currently benefits more than 4,700 children aged 3–5.

### Child-Friendly Schools

For basic education, a number of legal and policy frameworks and systems have been established, including the Basic Education Law (2008) and (2010). These laws make education free and compulsory for students of primary school age. The MOE is implementing the Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) approach with the support of UNICEF. Known in Timor-Leste as "EskolaFoun" (new schools), the approach promotes child-centred teaching and learning, improved school management, safe and healthy school environments with water and sanitation facilities, and active participation of the community through Parent-Teacher Associations and School Management Committees. In 2015 and early 2016, the MOE revised the curriculum and rolled out a teacher training programme reflecting the CFS approach.



## Synergy between Programmes

Multi-sectoral collaboration and action are key to ensuring a smooth transition between different early childhood interventions. For this reason, synergy between parenting and preschool programmes is being established. The parenting programme, in all its different delivery modes, reiterates the importance of early stimulation and early childhood education, and encourages parents to enrol their children on time into primary school. Alternative preschools also act as a venue for parenting programme sessions. Parents from the community, especially the ones whose children attend the alternative preschool, are encouraged to attend the parenting sessions. The preschool facilitators are trained to facilitate the parenting programme. This also complements the alternative preschool facilitators' knowledge on child-centred pedagogy.

Plans are also being developed to support a smooth transition to Grade 1 of children "graduating" from the alternative preschools. This will include possible "twinning" of the alternative preschool teachers with the Grade 1 teachers in the nearest basic education school so they can

## Initial Findings

The alternative preschool models have quickly gained acceptance within communities. Parent interviews show they are happy with the facilitators' teaching and interaction skills. Some parents say they can see the difference in the quality of teaching and learning compared to that being offered by the public preschools. In five alternative preschools, community members have come together to build better classrooms and contributed funds to recognize the facilitators' efforts. Another six alternative preschools have submitted proposals to the local government leaders to ensure sustainability of the preschools. UNICEF is actively encouraging and supporting all preschool committees to brainstorm strategies to make their community preschools better and sustainable.

## Conclusion

Early childhood education is proven to improve school readiness, reduce grade repetition and drop out, especially in the early grades of primary education (Arnold et al., 2008). The UNICEF-supported alternative preschool programme has been piloted in two districts of Timor-Leste only

of children from the home to early learning centres, and to the formal education system. And children from the remote communities will be the first to benefit. Overall, the notion of early childhood learning and preschool education is a relatively new concept of keen interest to the country. Therefore, this requires additional resources and the support of all relevant ministries to allow the changes to be long-lasting.

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learn from each other. This will expose the preschool facilitators to the more "formal" education system but also familiarise the Grade 1 teachers on play-based pedagogy in the alternative preschools. Familiarisation visits of alternative preschool students to the nearest basic education school will also be included.

since January 2016 and therefore it is too soon to know its impact. The parenting session too is a recent initiative in these two districts and its effect can only be measured at the end of 2017. Currently, progress in areas such as enrolment, attendance and change in knowledge is being continuously monitored. It is clear, however, that all these initiatives will support the smooth transition



# Promoting child development in remote indigenous communities on the Thailand-Myanmar border: Collaborating with community stakeholders and government partners to maximize impact

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## Background

Since 2004, the Thai government has promoted and invested in institutionalizing large and centralized day care facilities throughout Thailand. But despite an increased number of schools, children from different ethnic groups and indigenous children in remote communities throughout Northern Thailand continue to have limited access to these facilities. Rather than attending early childhood programmes, children are often left with family members or accompany parents to the agricultural fields where they work. It is clear that children in these communities do not receive high quality care and early childhood education, and are at an increased risk of neglect, malnutrition and delayed development.

Indigenous communities have long been marginalized in Thailand. The prejudice towards people from ethnic minority and indigenous backgrounds often manifests in either a lack of access to early childhood education or low quality education, due to internalized biases that bar indigenous children from attending schools. Additionally, people from these indigenous communities are often not permitted, or not given the opportunity to, become Thai citizens, have limited access to higher education, and are restricted by the government from moving between districts. All of these factors are discriminatory and prevent individuals from reaching their full potential. In these typically rural and remote mountainous areas, most people work in agriculture. These factors contribute to poor early childhood development and education in two main ways. First, day care centres are often far from small villages, and working parents do not have the time or resources to transport their children to day care. Second, the government funds schools

and day cares based on the number of students enrolled, not on students' needs. This means that students who are from low income families, and whose parents are not able to supplement their education at home, are not helped by the government with extra funding to provide educational materials.

To combat these issues, The Life Skills Development Foundation (TLSDF) began a comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programme in 2005,



in the Pang Mapha and Pai districts of Mae Hong Son Province in Northern Thailand. The goals were to support community-based prenatal care and parenting care for children aged 0-2, and to help build the capacity of day care centres and kindergartens for children aged 2-6, through close collaboration and partnerships with the local government and public schools. The project would not have been possible without the generous support of Johnson & Johnson, Thailand.

In Thailand, *Tambon* (sub-district) Administrative Organizations (TAOs) are responsible for managing village day care centres. TAOs receive funding from district level governments for this task, but they are

often not given enough money to run high-quality day care centres. TAOs can provide supplementary funding to the centres from their own sources if they wish. However, TAOs are principally composed of elected officials who often allocate money to visible projects that will please voters, such as infrastructure improvements. Because improvements in day care centres are not as immediately obvious or valued, TAOs do not prioritize early childhood care. This leaves day care centres, particularly those in poor indigenous communities, extremely underfunded. Also, TAOs are often unfamiliar with TLSDF's working model of investing in local capacity building. They prefer to invest in physical infrastructure, so TLSDF works to demonstrate the importance of dedicating resources to training individuals, such as teachers and day caregivers.

In many villages where the ECCD programme operates, education is not highly valued. Economic and educational opportunities are limited, and most residents work on farms. Since it is not believed that high quality education will produce high quality farmers, many families do not prioritize time spent on education. Furthermore, some families do not believe day cares provide quality care, and prefer to bring their children to farms where they work.

## Project Approach

The ECCD project operates at three levels to comprehensively support child development and care for seven ethnic minority groups in Mae Hong Son Province.

### Community: Parenting Volunteer Programme

To promote supportive and healthy home environments for children aged 0-2, local

“Parenting Volunteers” (PVs) were recruited and trained to conduct educational home visits to teach community members about pre- and post-natal care, parenting methods, child development, child nutrition and dental hygiene. This volunteer community health worker model has been employed successfully around the world (Brenner et. al., 2011; Perry & Zulliger, 2012). The recruited PVs were service-minded and community leaders, and typically had



personal parenting experience, but did not work in professional ECCD contexts. PVs were trained on holistic child development, the benefits of breastfeeding, and children’s rights. Additionally, they learned to assess child development and identify cases requiring additional support, such as children with autism or intellectual disabilities. PVs created community maps indicating where expecting mothers or children aged 0-2 lived, and visited each home an average of four times over a one year period to train and support parents, and provide care packages with items like eggs and diapers. Through these interactions, PVs built strong relationships with families, and were seen as resources for parenting concerns. Follow-up meetings were conducted with TLSDF staff when PVs were concerned about specific children.

#### Schools: Continuing Education for Day Caregivers and Kindergarten Teachers

ECCD used three main strategies to encourage optimal child development in schools. First, day caregivers and kindergarten teachers were trained on evidence-based ECCD teaching strategies. These educators live far from urban districts and receive minimal training from the federal government. TLSDF organized bi-annual trainings on child development, child rights, and experiential learning techniques.

Second, grants and government funding were secured to make child-friendly renovations to the interior and exterior environments of 37 day care centres and 55 kindergartens. The buildings were improved in ways that maintained their traditional building design, which helped children feel safe and assisted parents to feel familiar with the spaces. These perceptions contribute to feelings of comfort with the programmes (Ajmera et. al. 2010). Each day care was equipped with the “Four Corners” of engaging toys and supplies: books, building blocks, toy homes and global nature scenes. Additionally, the outdoor areas of day cares were renovated to create play areas and to protect children while they played; for example in one centre a fence was built to block off the area near a cliff.

These two strategies helped many children, but many others in target districts lived too far from day care centres, and could not access formal early childhood education. To address this barrier, nine new day cares were created in hard-to-reach villages where the TAOs did not have enough money to establish day cares, through the cooperation of TLSDF staff, community members and TAO officials. The ultimate goal was to turn over day care centre management to the government, with TAOs independently running the centres after one year of operation. Surveys were conducted to identify villages with the greatest number of children aged 0-4 living far from day cares as locations for new child-friendly centres. Simultaneously, new day caregivers were recruited, trained and supported to

complete apprenticeships before children were enrolled. After 12-18 months, the TAOs successfully assumed full control of the day cares. Today, four years after the first centre was established, the centres are flourishing and providing children with integral educational and developmental opportunities.

Throughout the renovation and construction process, communities united to support their children. Parents, PVs, TAO officials and others contributed to building spaces for their children, and continue to work on their maintenance. Communities are proud of their accomplishments with the day care centres, and the collaborative process has fostered a sense of shared responsibility for supporting children to reach their fullest potential.

#### Government: Capacity Building and Resource Mobilization in the Local Government

The ultimate goal of ECCD is to establish systems that promote the holistic development of children from before birth to six years old; systems that can be operated independently and sustainably. Thailand’s national policy of supporting quality, community-based, pre-primary schools relies upon close collaboration between governments and NGOs (Kammerman, 2002). To achieve this goal, TLSDF worked closely with local governments and stakeholders at every stage of the project. In each sub-district, government officials helped to both create and participate in working groups that assisted with the coordination and training of PVs, day caregivers and kindergarten teachers. By including government officials, TLSDF was able to engage in advocacy

Table 1: Total Number of Child Beneficiaries of the ECCD Project

Year	Children Aged 0-2	Children Aged 2-4	Children Aged 4-6	Total
<b>2005 – 2007</b>	412	503	535	1,450
<b>2008 – 2010</b>	449	457	420	1,326
<b>2011 – 2013</b>	462	415	423	1,300
<b>2014 – 2015*</b>	375	315	308	998
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,698</b>	<b>1,690</b>	<b>1,686</b>	<b>5,074</b>

\* Note that these numbers only represent a single year. The statistics for 2015-2016 are not yet available.

about the importance of early childhood care and development with this influential group. Government officials are now more enthusiastic about supporting the programmes after TLSDF's participation.

### Outcomes

During its 11 years of operation, the ECCD programme has promoted holistic child development for over 5,000 students, tangibly impacting many communities throughout Northern Thailand. Through PV visits, parents have become more aware of the importance of pre- and post-natal care, close parental supervision and supporting young children's development. PVs reached families who otherwise would have received no support to promote their children's health and development. Parents expressed gratitude for the learning opportunities provided around child development, as it allowed them to better understand their children's behaviour. For example, young children were previously spanked if they were seen touching their genitals, but multiple parents remarked that they ceased punishing their children for this when they learned that exploration of body parts is a normal part of development.

The ECCD project has also had a great impact outside of homes. For instance, 101 day care centres were renovated or built to promote the holistic development of children in safe spaces. The renovations and training of educators on experiential learning in these spaces has enabled children to apply their education in myriad ways, including more life skills-based contexts. For example, children at one day care centre took a field trip to learn about the growth of soybean plants, and then learned to cook the soybeans to make soybean milk, a nutritious beverage which they often drank. Nine new day care centres were established, allowing many children to access high quality early childhood education.

In addition to these tangible benefits for 5,074 children in Northern Thailand, the ECCD project has supported and developed a passionate cohort of trained PVs, day caregivers and kindergarten teachers, who provide quality ECCD services and encourage their fellow community members to value ECCD, effectively and efficiently spreading the goals of the programme far beyond the direct

beneficiaries. Furthermore, collaboration with local governments, particularly TAOs, changed how political bodies value ECCD. A TLSDF project coordinator reflected that the project, even after its official completion, continuously impacts the communities through its investment in building the capacity of locals who will keep sharing their knowledge with new parents.

### Lessons Learned

The first lesson learned from the ECCD programme was that while it is incredibly important to be culturally respectful in programme implementation, at times it is necessary to explain to community members how certain traditions and actions could hamper the development of children. Training on capacity building equipped community members with the tools needed to convert their new understandings into action. One heavily embedded belief in many communities which impeded child development was the idea that caregiving is solely the mothers' responsibility, not a joint effort between both parents. Engaging fathers in the parenting process was challenging, and the project team learned that future outreach should address all caretakers, including fathers and grandparents, to promote familial childcare responsibility sharing. Second, while PVs did not need to be convinced of ECCD's importance, additional training had to be organized to build PVs' self-esteem, teamwork skills and teaching strategies in order to increase the effectiveness of their home visits. Lastly, TLSDF learned that while shifting the values of TAO officials and parents to prioritize ECCD was a slow process, it was hugely important for the long-term impact.

### Conclusion

The success of the ECCD project was grounded in its multi-faceted approach of partnering with communities, schools and governments to promote the holistic development of children in Pai and Pang Mapha districts of Mae Hong Son Province. It is hoped that the development of young children will be supported for many years by TLSDF's work in improving local systems, fostering development in homes and schools, and advocating for meaningful policy change.

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# Family Engagements: Rekindling the Bayanihan (Community) spirit in developing early literacy and language-rich environments

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## Introduction

There is limited research examining how language and literacy environments at home support the emergent literacy of young children in multilingual family settings (Soltero-Gonzalez, 2008). In the past, supporting children to speak a language other than the major community language was considered a risk for educational failure but it is now recognised that language-rich and literacy-rich environments are supportive of children's development and academic achievement (Baker, 2011). Thus interest has shifted to focus on the ways in which teachers recognise and value the different ways literacy is supported in homes and communities (Mui & Anderson, 2008) and what counts as a literacy-rich environment. High quality literacy practices are needed to create a literacy-rich environment for children. Literacy practices are defined as 'cultural ways of utilising literacy' (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 8, in Volk & de Acosta, 2003) and include the behaviours of those involved as well as the ways in which they understand and value literacy (Volk & de Acosta, 2003).

It would be simplistic to assume that the frequency of storybook reading or of other specific literacy-related practices in isolation is a reliable predictor of later literacy outcomes. Roberts, Jurgens & Burchinal (2005) found that a global measure of overall responsiveness and support of the home environment was a stronger predictor of children's early language and literacy skills than were specific literacy practices such as shared book reading. The home environment arises from social construction of families and the impact of daily experiences on children's lives. People's actions, goals and circumstances within activities are profoundly interconnected, and children bring to school their own experiences of literacy and the social practices from which these have developed. For many children, these do not match the social practices of the school (Marsh, 2003) and they are faced with the dilemma of either changing their

values and practices to accommodate the school setting, or if unable to do so, they face the possibility of poor literacy and school outcomes.

## Theoretical Framework and Research Problem

The study is based on the theory of social interaction that "assumes language acquisition is influenced by the interaction of a number of factors – physical, linguistic, cognitive, and social" (Cooter & Reutzel, 2004, pp. 198-199). Interactionists argue that language development is both biological and social, that language learning is influenced by the desire of children to communicate (Cooter & Reutzel, 2004). The social interactionist approaches rest on the premises of a social-cognitive model, emphasising the child's construction of a social world which then serves as the context of language development (Gallaway and Richard, 1994).

This study sought to answer: (1) What strategies were utilised by the school and the families to create meaningful language-rich home and school programmes for children? (2) How did parents perceive their child's home to be a "Real Book", that is, a giant, 3-D contextualized picture book? (3) How did parents realise language-rich home and school programme to be a crucial goal in their child's literacy development? and (4) How did parents and professionals define and support the language-rich home and school programme?

## Methodology

### Research Design

The case study method was used in this study. A case study can be viewed as "an in-depth study of interactions of a single instance in an enclosed system" (Opie, 2005, p. 115). For this paper, the focus of the case study is on real situations with real people in an environment familiar to the participants (Opie, 2004). Using the

case study method allowed for exploration of actions and events of the participants over at least a three-year period in natural settings; providing a deeper understanding of their student teaching life (Yin, 2003).

## Setting

This study took place in an inclusive school in Roxas City, Philippines, that has included children with special needs since 1997. The school has been continuously permitted to function since 1993 and was nationally recognised in 2003. The school adheres to a play-based curriculum with lessons, activities and programmes designed for children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity and physical, cognitive and emotional strength, and integrates principles from education research such as Whole-Brain Learning, Multi-Grade Programme, Social-Emotional Learning, Multiple Intelligences Theory, Learning Styles, and Environment-based and Culture-based education, eventually resulting in a curriculum tailored to each child's uniqueness.

## Participants

A total of 16 participants were involved in the study: six parents, five teachers, and five learners (with and without special needs). All of the participating adults represented a broad range of capability and were exposed to the inclusive education system. The participants were chosen for the study because they have been subject to the programme of the school for at least three years and are the major stakeholders who are involved in designing, giving, receiving or administering the programme. This approach to selecting participants is identified by Given (2008) as relevant to achieve purposive sampling.

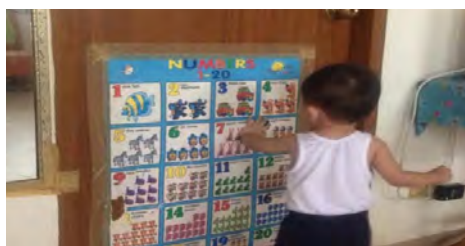
## Data Collection Procedures and Analysis

In-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants, on-site observations, focus group discussions and document and

archival explorations were used to craft communal and substantive accounts of those deeply involved in the inclusive programme of the school. Qualitative analysis consisted of analysis of similarities and differences, coding and categorising, and constant comparison, strategies identified by Lunenberg and Irby (2008) as effective approaches to qualitative analysis.

## Findings and Discussions

*Strategies utilised by the school and the families to create meaningful language-rich home and school programme*



### 1 Language-rich Environment

Data show that the School Programme has the following components that are vital to achieving language-rich school and home environments:

- Developing a Learning Culture.**  
 The school-wide collaborative team develops a set of principles governing oral language in the classroom that will translate into principle-based functional everyday practices.
- Setting up the Learning Environment and Spaces.**  
 The team identifies and organises the indoor and outdoor learning spaces to maximise language enhancement. Materials are displayed systematically to help stimulate conversations with children.
- Collaborative Teaching.**  
 Teachers, administrators, parents and caregivers are committed to contributing in a systematic, consistent way to a language-rich school and home. Everyone has training on adult-child interaction techniques that maximise children's language growth.
- Designing a Language Plan, Monitoring, and Evaluation integrated into daily activities.**  
 The team develops a set of objectives for each school year for linguistic content, form and use, and is

integrated in all sensory activities, playful science, mathematics and functional language.



### 2 Equipping the Stakeholders

Elements contributing to equipping the stakeholders are:

- Parent Education Programme (PEP).**  
 The programme recognises the parents' role as first educators. The PEP develops parents' competencies as stewards of their children's learning, making them knowledgeable, skilful facilitators that help stimulate and support the whole development of their children.
- Parent Workshops.**  
 As determined by feedback from all stakeholders, workshops, usually on developmentally appropriate materials and activities for Parents and Caregivers, are conducted at least three times a year to address identified needs. These workshops are often held at school and facilitated by school staff or invited resource speakers.
- Caregiver Empowerment Programme.**  
 In the school, almost 90% of the families of students have hired help acting as tertiary and sometimes even as secondary caregivers to the children both at home and in school. These caregivers, most of whom wait in school for their charges, are trained to develop their knowledge, values, attitudes and skills to help implement the home-based programme.
- Home Visits.**  
 This is done by the teaching staff to assess the quality and quantity of stimulation and support available to the child in the home. This assessment is shared with the parents and the teachers work with the parents to identify how the home can be transformed into a Language-Rich Environment.

### • Home-Based Programme.

The school partners with the parents in creating and implementing a Personalised Home-based Programme as part of the child's Individualised Education Programme. It includes aspects like Routine Building and Behaviour Management and is designed so that parents can aid in and monitor the development of their child's functional skills, early literacy and numeracy.



### 3 School-Home Partnership

Elements contributing to the home-school partnership are:

- Setting up the Language-Rich Home Environment based on the child's Individualised Education Programme focuses on establishing indoor and outdoor Reading Nooks, Music and Movement Areas and Sensory Areas; and labelling parts of the home, both indoors and outdoors.
- School-Home Link Learning Kits, multi-sensory materials and activities based on the interests and skills of the child, are used by parents at home to reinforce their child's learning at school.

*Parents' perceptions of their child's home as a "Real Book" environment*

### 4 Active Participation

*We found out that the "real books" make the children recall things more easily compared to when they were exposed to just abstract concepts. With concrete things, they can see, touch, hear, taste and experience. Now we understand the multi-sensory approach and we see that continued exposure to environments where actual learning is taking place help children better understand their environment – Parent*

Parents created a language-rich home by displaying alphabets of different sizes and in attractive colours. The entire home becomes a "school", with everything around as "real books". The child is not forced to learn but instead learns because "playing and learning" is a normal daily activity. The child's curiosity in things and letters around him/her eventually lead to a desire to read.

*Parents' realisations that a language-rich home and school programme is a crucial goal in their child's literacy development.*

## 5 Belief in and attitude towards the programme

*I realised that our language-rich environment has been helping our child to develop fast. Without the programme, it may have taken him another year to learn what he has learned now. We don't need to force him to learn because he enjoys learning. He has a momentum in learning and it is us who are now challenged to match his habit of learning*  
– Parent

The effectiveness of the programme depends on the parents' PEP attendance, consistency of application of the home programme, and the parents' dedication. Daily exposure to a language-rich environment resulted in facilitative learning without pressure.

*Parents' and professionals' definitions of and support for the language-rich home and school programme.*

## 5 Commitment and Dedication

The parents' engagement, support and cooperation are reflected in their attendance in PEP and in Feedback Sessions for progress monitoring and evaluation. The implementation of the personalized Home Programme is done by parents who are empowered through PEP. Parents also update themselves via the school's Facebook closed group where parenting articles are posted.

## Conclusion

The case study on the Inclusive Programme of the school showed that both the school and the families created a meaningful Language-Rich School and Home Programme for children by providing an environment in which each child can pursue his/her development. In the creation of

the learning environment, parents play a critical role in facilitating the acquisition and application of language. This confirms the vital role that the home plays in early literacy. The school serves as the training centre to empower parents to implement the language rich-home environment. The PEP is also a venue to strengthen the support system among all stakeholders, a support system which has created a culture unique to the school.

Real places in the community, or "Real Books", are where children learn lessons in the actual environment. Through "Real Books", children explore, experience and engage in real learning. Parents realise that their homes can be real books and safe learning spaces where children experience support during challenges while being engaged in learning. Children are provided with people and learning tools that enable them to develop to their fullest potential. They are guided to reconnect with their communities and diverse resources and to become deeply engaged in their own learning. This coordinated and collaborative school-and-home partnership is an intentional system to produce life-long learners who are thoughtful, creative, competent, intellectually curious and civically engaged. The success of this programme is the common purpose and responsibility of all adults.

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# ARNEC CONNECTIONS

Working Together for Early Childhood

## ARNEC Connections No. 11, 2016

**Theme:**

'The transformative power of Early Childhood Development (ECD): Seamless transitions across the continuum from prenatal to 8 years'

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*ARNEC will be guided by our core values as we pursue Vision 2020 championing every young child's well-being and development in the Asia-Pacific region.*

## **OUR CORE VALUES**

ARNEC is rights based. We uphold the protection of children's rights in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We respect diversity and non discrimination in our membership and in the early childhood development (ECD) community.

We are inclusive, encouraging members to actively participate in our activities, as much as we respond to the needs of the ECD community in the Asia-Pacific region.

We are a group of equal partners, who consult and share information, ideas and good practices with each other.

And we value accountability. We hold ourselves responsible to our members, partners, donors and stakeholders.

## **ARNEC SETS VISION 2020 FOR YOUNG CHILDREN IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION**

### **VISION**

All young children in the Asia-Pacific region realise optimal well-being and development.

### **MISSION**

ARNEC shares knowledge and advocates for children's rights and inclusive and holistic ECD.

### **CORE VALUES**

Rights based, diverse, inclusive, accountable and committed to partnerships.

### ***ARNEC will serve as a leading knowledge platform for ECD in the Asia-Pacific region.***

There are millions of young children in the Asia-Pacific region. They need no less than their rights upheld in homes, communities and societies, where their well-being and development are prioritised, guaranteed and protected.

Building on ECD challenges and opportunities in the region, ARNEC puts forward a new, expansive strategy that defines our contributions for achieving the ECD targets in the Sustainable Development Goals. We are committed to pursuing our four strategic goals, all in support of holistic and inclusive ECD.

## **WHAT HAVE WE SET OUT TO ACHIEVE BY 2020?**

### ***Strategic Goal 1:***

***Improve advocacy for holistic and inclusive ECD***

ARNEC will continue to engage policy makers and stakeholders, including members, advocating the holistic nature of ECD in policies and programmes, and the strong interlinkages of Target 4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the rest of the SDGs. We will highlight approaches that focus on equitable access to and participation in holistic ECD programmes and which therefore address discrimination based on gender, economic status, vulnerability, ethnicity, language, disability and location.

### ***Strategic Goal 2:***

***Increase the knowledge base on ECD***

ARNEC will work with partners to generate and consolidate new knowledge through research, documentation of good practices, and development of ECD tools and other resources. Priorities include

neuroscience; equitable access to ECD; importance of transition; nutrition for the 'first thousand days'; 'left behind children'; ECD and social cohesion; and learning through play. ARNEC will invest in knowledge and information dissemination.

### ***Strategic Goal 3:***

***Increase strategic partnerships and memberships***

As a regional network, ARNEC will encourage more institutional and individual members, ensuring full participation from highly diverse partners and members. ARNEC will engage sub-regional networks; undertake joint activities with core team and institutional members; and explore strategic partnerships with the private sector and other institutions committed to ECD. ARNEC will continue to represent the region in global ECD platforms and networks.

### ***Strategic Goal 4:***

***Strengthen ARNEC's reach and impact at the country level***

Improving country-level linkages will widen and deepen ARNEC's reach and impact. This involves continued advocacy, informed by knowledge generation and management, including broadening partnerships within and beyond the Asia-Pacific region.

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*Organisational capacity is essential to achieve ARNEC's Vision 2020. We will invest in diversifying expertise in the Board of Directors and Steering Committee, raising the capacities of the Secretariat, as well as strengthening efforts to mobilize ECD resources in the Asia-Pacific region.*



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